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THE ACES®

124 

John Weal

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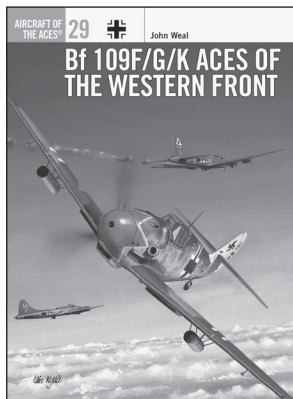
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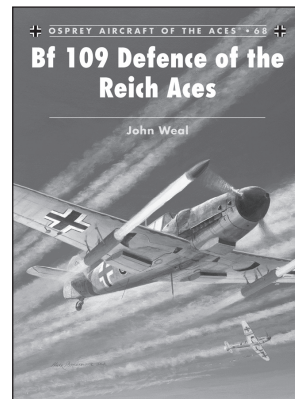
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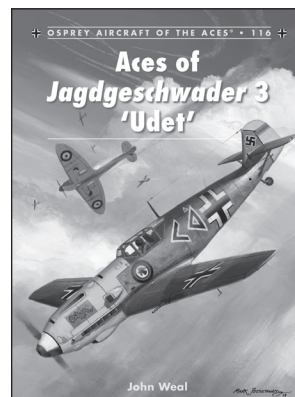
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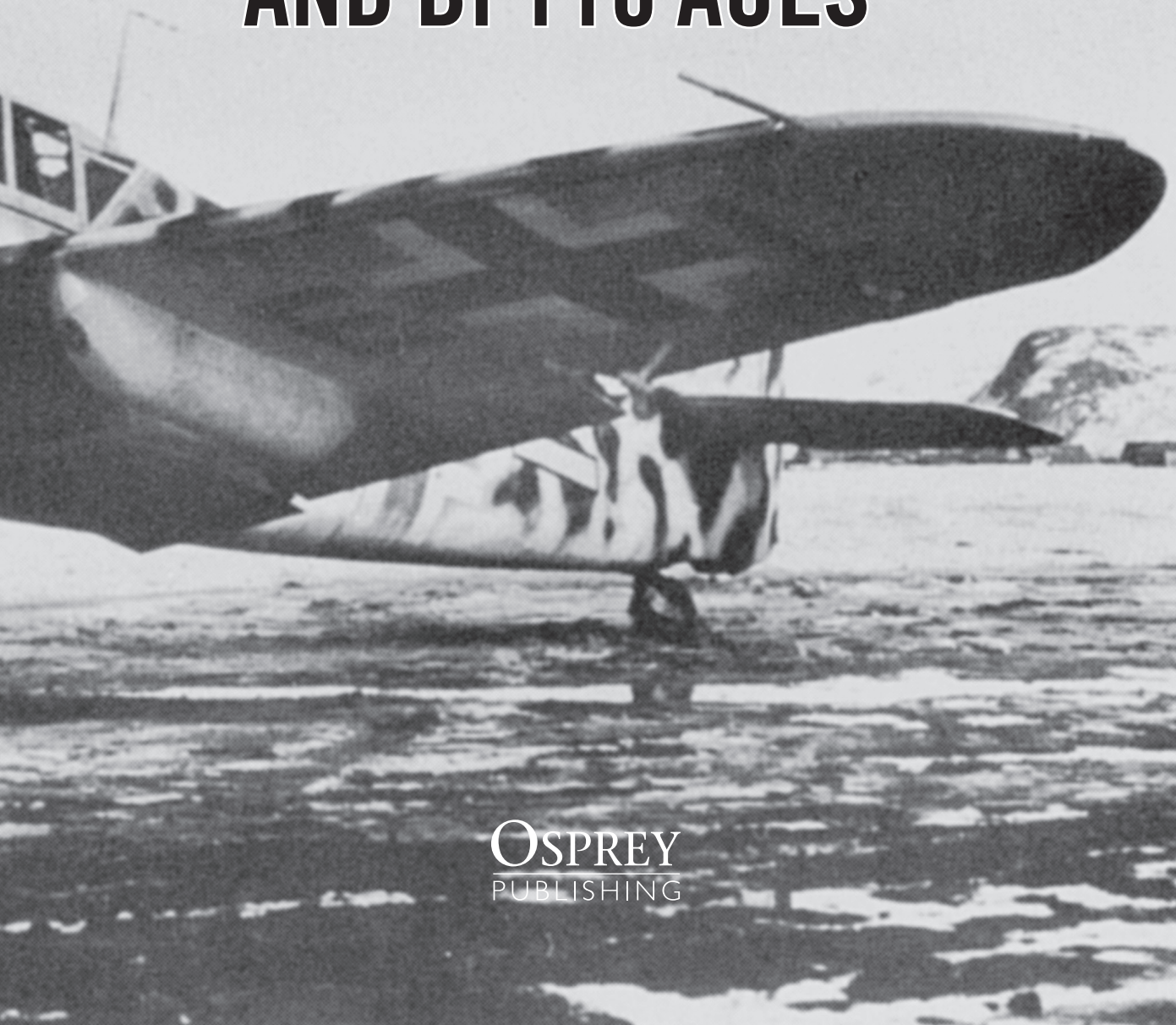
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Front Cover

During the brief midsummer months of 1943 – a period when the Arctic sun never set – the pilots of II. and III./JG 5 fought numerous actions in defence of their own small, but vitally important, coastal supply convoys. With seeming disregard for the losses they were suffering, the Soviets would throw in wave after wave of attack- and torpedo-bombers against these convoys and, as a result, many of JG 5's Arctic *Experten* found themselves adding significantly to their already impressive tallies.

One such engagement took place late on the evening of 4 July when the Bf 109s of 7. and 8. *Staffeln* successfully fought off a mixed force of low-flying Il-2s, Pe-2s, Bostons and Hampdens that were attacking an inbound convoy making its way down the west coast of the Rybachiy Peninsula. In the space of less than 20 minutes no fewer than 19 enemy aircraft had been shot down into the sea, six of them being claimed by Leutnant Theo Weissenberger alone.

Recently appointed as *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 5, Weissenberger had already caught and despatched a single Pe-3 reconnaissance aircraft off the northwestern tip of the peninsula some 45 minutes before the main assault began. In the fierce melee that followed, he quickly accounted for a trio of Il-2s (the second of these was the 100th victory of his career) before going after a gaggle of five Hampden torpedo-bombers. The first of these went down almost immediately, but it then took a five-minute chase at wave-top height before the second cartwheeled into the water from a height of just ten metres. Two minutes after that Weissenberger claimed his seventh, and last, victim of the day – an incident vividly captured in Mark Postlethwaite's specially commissioned cover artwork

Title pages

A variation on the winter theme, this heavily mottled Bf 109G-2/R6 '*Kanonboot*' ('gunboat' – note the underwing cannon gondolas) is the 'Yellow 3' that 94-victory ace Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Müller was forced to put down on its belly on a frozen lake a few kilometres to the east of Murmansk on 19 April 1943 (via *Eddie Nielinger*)

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CHAPTER ONE

1941 — THE OPENING MONTHS

Much has been written about Germany's invasion of Russia on 22 June 1941. This is not altogether surprising given the fact that, as Hitler himself had boasted, Operation *Barbarossa* would be the 'greatest military operation of all time'. The *Führer* of the Third Reich was to hurl very nearly three million men, some 3500 tanks, more than 7000 artillery pieces, 600,000 motor vehicles, almost three-quarters of a million horses and nearly 2000 aircraft into his ultimately ill-fated assault on fellow dictator Josef Stalin, claiming that 'The world will hold its breath and fall silent when *Barbarossa* is mounted'.

The world may have held its breath, but it was far from silent. News headlines around the globe screamed word of the Wehrmacht's initial successes as Hitler's armed might smashed through the Soviet Union's frontier defences. Yet amidst all the opening thunder and furore, there was one tiny part of *Barbarossa* that was – and remains to this day – almost entirely overlooked. Far above the Arctic Circle, separated from the main fighting fronts by more than a thousand kilometres of near featureless Finnish forest, small opposing bands of German and Soviet forces were locked in a self-contained, almost private war of their own.

Bisected by the River Litsa, the 100 kilometres of coastal tundra that separated Petsamo from Murmansk formed the inhospitable backdrop against which much of the Luftwaffe's 40-month Arctic war against the Soviets was fought

The bulk of the relatively few German troops that were in the far north was made up of two mountain divisions under the overall command of General Eduard Dietl, the 'Hero of Narvik', who had been the first member of the Wehrmacht to be awarded the prestigious Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross (thereby beating the Luftwaffe fighter pilot duo Werner Mölders and Adolf Galland into second and third places, respectively, by just over two months).

Dietl was briefed personally by Hitler on the role his mountain corps was to play on the Arctic Ocean front. Its first task, he was told, was to secure the mineral-rich regions around Petsamo, in northern Finland, currently held by the Russians, and then to advance the 'laughable 100 kilometres' – Hitler's own words – eastwards to capture Murmansk, the Soviet Union's only Arctic port that was ice-free all year round.

On 29 June 1941, exactly one week after the start of *Barbarossa*, during which time they had already taken Petsamo, Dietl's troops crossed the erstwhile Finnish–Russian border. But those 'laughable' 100 kilometres of barren tundra defeated them. The Wehrmacht's mountain specialists, who had been instrumental in conquering and occupying the whole of Norway in less than nine weeks just a year earlier, failed to reach Murmansk. They, and the Soviet units that had stubbornly barred their progress, then drew breath and began to dig in under the wan light of the midnight sun. For both sides it was the start of more than three years of static trench warfare – warfare more reminiscent of Flanders in 1914–18 than modern *Blitzkrieg*.

The strategically vital port of Murmansk, which was both destination for many of the now famous Arctic convoys ferrying western aid to the Soviet Union and northern terminus of the Moscow–Murmansk rail link, was also the focal point of the air war in the far north for much of the 38 months from the summer of 1941 to the early autumn of 1944.

The failure to ensure its capture at the outset of the campaign in the east was a blunder of the first order that would cost the Germans dear in the months and years ahead. One of the reasons given was the paucity of German troops on the ground. There was some justification in this, for the Arctic front was unquestionably the poor relation when it came to resources and supplies. And nowhere was this more apparent than in the air.

General Dietl had at least been given two full divisions with which to launch his abortive offensive against Murmansk. In contrast, his Luftwaffe opposite number, Oberst Andreas Nielsen – whose responsibilities as *Fliegerführer Kirkenes* were not only to provide support for Dietl's mountain troops, but also to achieve and maintain air superiority, carry out maritime reconnaissance duties and the mining of Soviet ports, attack the railways and canals that formed the Russians' lines of supply, protect German coastal shipping and sink the enemy's vessels – had to make do with just one full *Gruppe* (of Ju 87 Stukas), six assorted *Staffeln* and two ancillary *Schwärme* (formations of four aircraft).

The fighter units among this motley collection (which would later provide the nucleus of the future *Jagdgeschwader* (JG) 5) had only come into being a matter of weeks earlier. It was in February 1941 that a second I./JG 77 (the original I./JG 77 having been redesignated IV./JG 51 back in November 1940) was activated at Stavanger-Sola specifically to protect



the German convoys threading their way along the southern and western coasts of Norway from attack by RAF bombers.

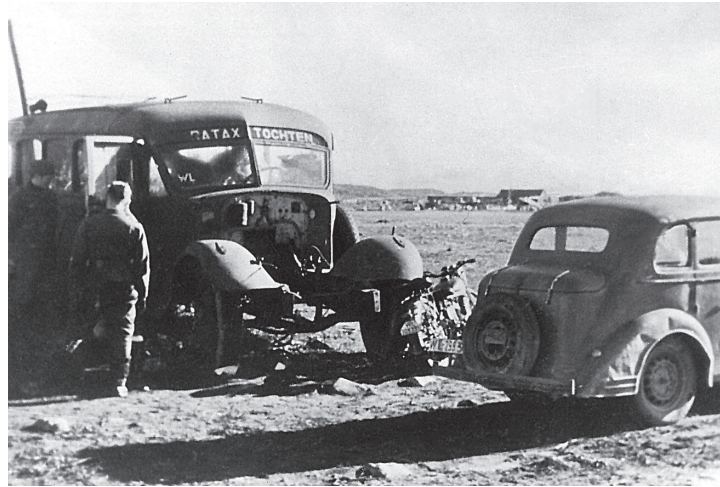
Then, early in June 1941 – in preparation for *Barbarossa* and as part of the ‘build-up’ of Luftwaffe forces in the far north – the ten Bf 109Es of 1./JG 77, led by their *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Horst Carganico, were transferred from Mandal, in southern Norway, up to Kirkenes in the Arctic. At the same time elements of 3./JG 77 were likewise moved north from Herdla to Kirkenes, where they were used to form the cadre of the totally new 14./JG 77. The fighter component of the *Fliegerführer Kirkenes* was completed by the addition of some 18 twin-engined Bf 110s – the 12 machines of Oberleutnant Felix-Maria Brandis’ 1.(Z)/JG 77 (formerly 2./ZG 76), plus the five or six *Zerstörer* previously operated by the now redundant *Geschwaderstab* ZG 76. This eclectic mix of single- and twin-engined fighters was provisionally designated IV./JG 77, and it was as such that the unit took its place in splendid isolation as the northernmost of all the 21 Luftwaffe *Jagdgruppen* ranged against the USSR for the start of *Barbarossa*.

On the opening day of the war against the Soviet Union German fighters on the three main fronts claimed a staggering 267 enemy fighters shot down, plus close on another 1000 destroyed on the ground. But it was not until the third day of the campaign, 24 June 1941, that IV./JG 77 reportedly scored its first success. Details are somewhat sketchy, however, and the name of the pilot who brought down the unidentified Soviet bomber near Kirkenes on that date is no longer on record.

It was a slightly different story 24 hours later when an I-16 shot down over Petsamo provided a first kill for 14. *Staffel*’s Leutnant Heinrich Lesch. And the day after that, on 26 June, future Knight’s Cross winner Feldwebel Hugo Dahmer of 1. *Staffel* took his overall score into double figures. All nine of Dahmer’s previous victories had been achieved during the Battles

1./JG 77 staged northwards to Kirkenes in the first week of June 1941. Among the pilots grouped around the *Staffel*’s Oberstabsfeldwebel for this souvenir snapshot taken at Banak *en route* are no fewer than six Arctic aces-in-waiting, including future Knight’s Cross winner Feldwebel Hugo Dahmer (fourth from left). He already had nine notches carved on his ‘victory stick’ from earlier successes in the Battles of France and Britain

During the early days at Kirkenes the amenities were not exactly palatial. This old civilian bus, minus its engine but with the Luftwaffe's 'WL' daubed on the windscreen, was pressed into service as the *Zerstörerstaffel's* first operations room



of France and Britain while serving as an Unteroffizier with JG 26, the last of them a Hurricane downed over Kent on 30 September 1940. But once again details of his tenth victim are no longer known. Unfortunately, the many gaps in (and often total lack of) records concerning Luftwaffe fighter operations in the far north are a recurrent theme throughout the story of the air war in the Arctic.

Dietl's advance on Murmansk was not the only ground offensive in the northern region that failed to attain its objective. Some 400 kilometres to the south of Kirkenes along the so-called *Eismeerstrasse*, or Arctic Ocean Highway, the Finnish town of Rovaniemi sat astride the Arctic Circle. This was the jumping-off point for the two divisions of *General der Kavallerie* Hans Feige's XXXVI. *Armee-Korps*, which was tasked with pushing eastwards across the Soviet border to cut the important Murmansk railway line at Kandalaksha. Although Feige's divisions enjoyed at least token air support – as evidenced by the fact that Bf 109Es of 1./JG 77 were credited with a brace of Red Air Force Tupolev SB-3 bombers in the Rovaniemi area on 27 June – hardening Russian resistance meant that the German troops were unable to reach, let alone breach, the vital Murmansk–Moscow supply line.

Nevertheless, the Murmansk railway would continue to attract the attention of the Luftwaffe's bombers and Stukas in the months to come, which in turn meant that the airfield at Rovaniemi, together with those at Kemijärvi and Alakurtti, would frequently play host to contingents of Arctic Ocean fighters on temporary detachment from the fighting around Murmansk.

Murmansk, however, was, and would remain, the main focal point of Arctic air operations. And it was in this area on 28 and 29 June that the first major aerial clashes were to take place. The pilots of IV./JG 77 claimed no fewer than eight enemy machines on each of these two days, Feldwebel Hugo Dahmer getting a pair on 28 June and three victories 24 hours later. This took his overall score to date to 15 and made him the first known Arctic ace. Leutnant Heinrich Lesch's second, sent down on the afternoon of 29 June, was identified as an 'ARK-3' but it was more likely to have been a Tupolev SB 'twin'.

The first known pilot to score an Arctic kill was 14./JG 77's Leutnant Heinrich 'Willi' Lesch, who downed a Soviet I-16 over Petsamo on the afternoon of 25 June 1941. He would claim six further victories in the far north before being posted to France as a fighter instructor





Pictured here after claiming his third RAF victory – a Hudson brought down off southern Norway on 1 June 1941 – Leutnant Felix-Maria Brandis subsequently served an eventful seven months as *Kapitän* of the *Zerstörerstaffel* in the Arctic



But 29 June also witnessed IV./JG 77's first recorded loss when Hauptmann Alfred von Lojewski, the *Kapitän* of 14. *Staffel*, fell victim to Soviet flak. Although he managed to belly-land his damaged 'Red 3' north of Murmansk, he was quickly rounded up and taken into Soviet captivity.

By the end of June 1941 most of IV./JG 77's fighters had moved forward to Petsamo. The battle lines had thus been drawn up, with the Luftwaffe's Messerschmitts occupying Kirkenes and Petsamo, two fields only about 40 kilometres apart, and the Soviet fighters concentrated on a clutch of airfields around Murmansk. The 100 kilometres or so of tundra that separated the opposing forces formed the arena over which much of the Arctic air war was to be fought.

This was certainly the case during the first half of July 1941, by the end of which time Dietl's mountain troops had managed to force a crossing of the River Litsa, the halfway point of their advance on Murmansk. It would seem that the ground forces were being supported by the Luftwaffe's Bf 110s, for 5 July saw both the first known *Zerstörer* victory in the Arctic and the first recorded loss. Hauptmann Gerhard Schaschke of the *Geschwaderstab* ZG 76 claimed that day's only kill – an I-16 over the Litsa bridgehead. This success was offset, however, by the loss of 1.(Z)/JG 77 crew pilot Leutnant Dietrich Weyerang and his wireless-operator/gunner Unteroffizier Kurt Tiggers, who were both killed when their 'LN+ER' was brought down by Soviet flak to the west of Litsa Bay.

The *Gruppe* clearly did not allow the fighting along the Litsa to interfere with its maritime patrol commitments, for two of the six claims submitted on 11 July were for 'Consolidateds' – very likely *Gidro Samolyet Transportnyi* (GST) or 'hydro transport aircraft', which were Soviet licence-built variants of the Consolidated PBV-1 Catalina flying boat. One of them was credited to Oberleutnant Horst Carganico, the *Staffelkapitän* of 1./JG 77. This was reportedly the 13th kill of the war, and the seventh in the Arctic, for an officer who was to become one of the region's most successful and best-known characters.

Although not yet three weeks into the campaign against the Soviet Union, a number of future Arctic luminaries were already beginning to make their mark. The other 'Consolidated' of 11 July had fallen to

1./JG 77's Unteroffizier Martin Villing for his third victory. Villing's first had been a Tupolev 'twin' on 28 June, and the second another flying boat in the form of a Beriev MBR-2 of the Soviet Navy's Northern Fleet.

The clear leader in the scoring stakes at this stage was still Feldwebel Hugo Dahmer, his single success on 11 July (type unknown) taking his tally to 20, 11 of them achieved since the launch of *Barbarossa*.

On 21 July the Bf 110s of 1.(Z)/JG 77 were escorting a formation of Ju 88 bombers towards Murmansk when they spotted a trio of SB-3s approaching on a converging course. All three enemy bombers were promptly despatched, one of them providing the fourth victory of the war for *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Felix Brandis, whose first three kills had all been scored in the west. Brandis added an 'I-18' (MiG-3) to his total the following day and then claimed another Soviet fighter, an I-16 *Rata*, on 25 July. His next two victims, both downed on 30 July, would make Oberleutnant Felix Brandis the first known *Zerstörer* ace of the Arctic theatre, but those victims were not Russian!

Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 July 1941 had automatically made the United Kingdom and Russia somewhat uncomfortable 'allies-in-arms' against the common German foe. Despite his well-known and oft-expressed loathing and distrust of communism, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was keen to offer help to the Russians. Indeed, he gladly acceded to their appeals for a Royal Navy carrier strike to be mounted against the two main German-held ports on the Arctic Ocean coast. As a result, a British force, comprising the aircraft carriers HMS *Victorious* and HMS *Furious*, with two cruisers and six destroyers in company, had sailed from Scapa Flow on 23 July. While they were attacking Kirkenes and Petsamo the opportunity would be taken to pass the minelayer HMS *Adventure* independently through to the Russian White Sea port of Archangel with a large cargo of mines for Britain's newly acquired ally. But the hoped-for element of surprise was lost when the raiding force was sighted by a Luftwaffe reconnaissance machine on the afternoon of 30 July, shortly before the two carriers started to launch their strikes.

The 20 Albacores and nine Fulmars that took off from HMS *Victorious* ran into a veritable hornets' nest at Kirkenes. British sources ascribed the slaughter that followed to the fact that the German fighters were ready and waiting for them. What little shipping there was in the harbour was already underway and the anti-aircraft defences, they claimed, were fully alerted. One *Zerstörer* pilot, however, told a different story. According to his account, four Bf 110s of 1.(Z)/JG 77 had been tasked with escorting a force of Ju 88 bombers to Murmansk. Shortly after takeoff they noticed a number of aircraft circling Kirkenes harbour below them. Not recognising the unfamiliar machines, the *Zerstörer* pilots went down for a closer look and immediately realised from their markings that the antiquated-looking biplanes were British. Quickly abandoning their bomber escort duties, the Bf 110s waded into the Albacores, bringing down six of them

Staffelkapitän Felix Brandis was credited with two, as was Oberleutnant Max Franzisket, while Oberleutnants Karl-Friedrich Schlossstein and Karl-Friedrich Koch got one apiece. But the *Schwarm* of Bf 110s were not the only enemy machines snapping at the raiders' heels, for nine Bf 109s of 14./JG 77 and nine Ju 87s of IV.(St)/LG 1 had also been scrambled.



Oberfeldwebel Hugo Dahmer would be awarded the Arctic's first Knight's Cross on 1 August 1941 for his then total of 22 confirmed victories. By February 1942 that figure had risen to 34. Dahmer returned to the Channel Front and JG 26 late in 1942. Appointed *Staffelkapitän* of 1./JG 2 'Richthofen' on 17 August 1943, his operational career was brought to an end just 25 days later when he was severely wounded in a dogfight with Spitfires near Rouen

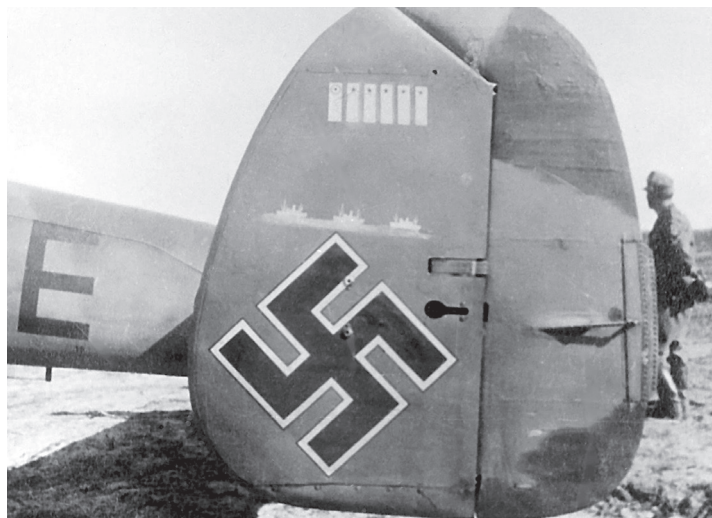
Altogether, the Luftwaffe pilots claimed a total of 23 British aircraft shot down over Kirkenes and Petsamo, with the ports' flak defences adding five more. Although these figures were grossly exaggerated, the Fleet Air Arm's actual losses were bad enough. Eleven out of the 20 Albacores that attacked Kirkenes were shot down, and all but one of the remaining nine suffered damage. Two of their escorting Fulmars also failed to return to *Victorious*.

The nine Albacores, nine Swordfish and six Fulmars that took off from *Furious* to strike at Petsamo escaped far more lightly. The opposition was less intense and only one Albacore and two Fulmars were lost. Hardly surprisingly, the pilots of IV./JG 77 did not recognise the carrier-based Fulmars for what they were and German claims for single-engined enemy fighters downed over Petsamo were listed as three Hurricanes and two Skuas.

The Luftwaffe's own losses for the day were just two machines. One was a Ju 87 reportedly shot down by the single fixed forward-firing Browning machine gun operated by the pilot of the only undamaged Albacore of the Kirkenes attack force (in what must surely have been one of the most unusual dogfights of World War 2!) and the other was a Bf 110 that had both engines set on fire by the rear-gunner of an Albacore that was on the point of crashing into the sea off Kirkenes. Flying at a height of only 50 metres, the pilot of the Bf 110 had no other option but to ditch. Fortunately the sea was calm and both crew members – the aforementioned Oberleutnant Karl-Friedrich Schlosstein and his wireless-operator/gunner Gefreiter Heinz Gutsche – survived to be picked up after two uncomfortable hours in their dinghy.

After the unexpected excitement of the 30 July carrier air strike, August was to see a return to the increasingly familiar routine of bomber escort and convoy patrol missions. The month began on something of a high note, however, with the award of the *Gruppe's* first Knight's Cross. It was presented to 1./JG 77's Oberfeldwebel Hugo Dahmer on 1 August for a score then standing at 22. The young Rhinelander had already developed quite a reputation as a lone wolf. Operating in close cooperation with the newly established *Freya* early-warning radar station – one of the first such installations to enter service anywhere on the eastern front – Dahmer

Displaying six victory bars (the first for an RAF Hudson downed over the North Sea on 12 June 1941 and the remaining five for Soviet fighters) plus three ships sunk, this is the tail of Hauptmann Gerhard Schaschke's 'M8+YE' (see colour profile 1). By the end of July 1941 the number of bars totalled 17, but just how many more were added before Schaschke's loss on 4 August 1941 is not known





would patrol at high altitude waiting for the ground controller to vector him onto an enemy formation flying below. Armed with this information, he would swoop down on the often-unsuspecting Soviet machines and clinically pick one off. It was a tactic that worked time after time.

Another member of the *Gruppe* who employed a tactic of his own devising to similar good effect was *Zerstörer* pilot Hauptmann Gerhard Schaschke of the attached *Stab/ZG* 76. He would take to the air in the company of one or more Bf 109s who played the part of 'willing bait'. So secure were they in the belief of their own superiority and ability to get out of trouble if things did not go exactly according to plan, the Bf 109 pilots would happily 'trail their coats' over enemy territory tempting the Soviet fighters to have a go at them. But anyone unwary enough to do so without first carefully checking their tails would quickly find themselves caught in a storm of cannon and machine gun fire from the previously unseen Bf 110 bearing down on them from behind.

A classic example of Schaschke's methods had occurred on 13 July when a *Kette* (three-aircraft formation) of Bf 109s had buzzed one of the Soviet fighter airfields to the south of Murmansk. Predictably, the Red Air Force rose to the challenge – or rather, it attempted to do so – for Schaschke's Bf 110 suddenly 'appeared out of nowhere', shot down all three of the I-16 *Ratas* that had been scrambled, performed a cheeky victory roll and vanished as quickly as it had come. By this time Hauptmann Schaschke had become well known to his opponents. They had even given him a nickname – 'Carrots', possibly because of his ginger hair. But his good luck could not last forever, and fate finally overtook him on 4 August.

It was on this date that Schaschke returned to attack the same airfield where he had caught the trio of I-16s three weeks earlier. On this occasion he was accompanied by no fewer than three other Bf 110s and a *Schwarm* of Bf 109s. This time the defenders sent up not three tubby little *Ratas*, but four of their newer LaGG-3s. Schaschke nonetheless managed to down two of the fighters (which, in keeping with the times, he identified as I-301s) in one scything head-on pass. Then he was momentarily distracted by the chance arrival of three I-16s returning to base after an operational mission. The newcomers immediately curved in to attack the German machines and one of the remaining LaGGs grabbed the opportunity to put a burst of fire into Schaschke's 'M8+YE'.

Leutnant Felix-Maria Brandis' Bf 110E-1 'LN+FR' (Wk-Nr 4114) was photographed during its brief internment after landing by mistake at Tårendö, in Sweden, on 1 September 1941. Brandis and his wireless-operator/gunner Unteroffizier Alfred Harnach were repatriated within the week. Their aircraft was returned on 18 September after thorough examination by the Swedish air force. Note the eight victory bars on the tailfin – three British, three Soviet and then two British (the latter representing the two Fleet Air Arm Albacores claimed by Brandis over Kirkenes on 30 July)

With one of his engines pouring smoke, Schaschke dived away westwards clearly hoping to reach friendly territory but he did not make it. A Soviet search party found the aircraft on its belly to the southeast of Murmansk, Hauptmann Gerhard Schaschke dead in the cockpit. He had been killed when thrown forward against the instrument panel by the impact of the crash-landing. His wireless-operator/gunner, Unteroffizier Michael Widtmann, had apparently survived but refused to surrender, reportedly being 'fatally wounded in an exchange of fire with his would-be rescuers'.

References differ as to Schaschke's final overall score, although the consensus would appear to be around the 20 mark. As he had claimed only one victory prior to his arrival in the far north, it would seem fair to assume that he was, in fact, an Arctic ace several times over.

The *Gruppe* continued to suffer mixed fortunes throughout the rest of August. Some, like 1. *Staffel's* Oberleutnant Horst Carganico and Oberfeldwebel Hugo Dahmer, added steadily to their scores, the latter being credited with a trio of I-153s northeast of Petsamo on 26 August to take his tally to 28. On the other side of the coin, 14./JG 77 was particularly hard hit. In addition to a number of minor casualties, four of the *Staffel's* pilots were killed or reported missing during the course of the month.

On 21 August a small convoy of six merchant ships, five British and one Dutch, had left Iceland bound for the Russian Arctic port of Archangel. Codenamed 'Dervish', this trial convoy, escorted by units of the Royal Navy, was the forerunner of the famous PQ series of convoys that would subsequently deliver countless tons of military aid and supplies to the Soviets. The ships of 'Dervish' were laden mostly with raw materials, but also stowed aboard were 15 crated Hawker Hurricane fighters.

At the same time as 'Dervish' was making for Archangel, the ageing aircraft carrier HMS *Argus* was heading towards Murmansk with 24 more Hurricanes of the RAF's No 151 Wing (comprising Nos 81 and 134 Sqns) on board. When within range, the Hurricanes would be flown off to land at Vaenga, a Russian airfield on the shores of the Kola Inlet to the north of Murmansk. Here, they would be joined by the 15 'Dervish' machines after the latter had been unloaded and assembled in Archangel.

Argus and its attendant destroyers were spotted off Bear Island by a Luftwaffe reconnaissance machine on the afternoon of 3 September, but no action was taken. Four days later the 24 Hurricanes of Nos 81 and 134 Sqns took off from the carrier and all landed safely at Vaenga. The 15 'Dervish' aircraft would arrive there on 12 September. While the convoy had been at sea Winston Churchill had telegraphed Stalin informing the Soviet dictator that 40 Hurricanes should reach Murmansk by the end of the first week of September, with a further 200 to follow for use by Russian pilots. In fact, by war's end, very nearly 3000 Hurricanes had been delivered to the Soviets (see *Osprey Aircraft of the Aces 107 – Soviet Hurricane Aces of World War 2* for further details).

The apparent lack of a German response to the approach of *Argus* was due primarily to the fact that the Luftwaffe units in the area were all being readied to support a new ground offensive by Dietl's mountain regiments, which, it was hoped, would finally take them beyond the Litsa and on to Murmansk. The offensive was launched on 8 September, and it lasted all

An official portrait of Oberleutnant Horst Carganico, the ebullient *Staffelkapitän* of 1./JG 77, whose then total of 27 enemy aircraft destroyed earned him the Arctic's second Knight's Cross on 25 September 1941 (via Eddie Neillinger)



of 11 days. Still too few in number, Dietl's troops were unable to sustain their advance and strong Soviet counter-attacks forced them back across the Litsa to their original positions. Despite the minimal progress made on the ground, the Litsa front would be the arena over which much of the air action of the coming weeks was to be fought.

It was at this time too that the three Arctic *Staffeln* – 1./JG 77, 14./JG 77 and 1.(Z)/JG 77 – which had hitherto been operating in loose cooperation under the provisional title of IV./JG 77, were officially amalgamated into the JGr.z.b.V. Petsamo or 'Petsamo Special Purposes Fighter Wing'. A *Gruppenstab* was established at Kirkenes under the command of the veteran Major Hennig Strümpell. The new *Gruppe's* three component *Staffeln* – two fighter and one *Zerstörer* – retained their original designations, however. And the five Bf 109Es that took off from Petsamo early on the afternoon of 12 September to escort an Hs 126 tactical reconnaissance machine were aircraft of 1./JG 77. It was to the east of Litsa Bay that they were suddenly bounced by Hurricanes of No 81 Sqn.

The RAF pilots were flying only their second operational mission since arriving at Vaenga. In a short, sharp skirmish they claimed the hapless Henschel and three of the five Bf 109s. In reality, together with the Hs 126, only one Luftwaffe fighter was lost. Leutnant Eckhardt von der Lühé's 'Yellow 10' going down 'belching flames and smoke and shedding debris'. The British also suffered the loss of one fighter, Sgt N H Smith's Hurricane taking hits in the engine and a gaping hole being blown in the fuselage immediately aft of the cockpit. Unable to slide back his canopy, Smith had no alternative but to attempt an emergency landing. He was last seen wrestling with the hood as his machine, trailing smoke and slowly losing height, headed back towards the Kola Inlet and Vaenga. Unfortunately, the Hurricane somersaulted as it hit the ground, killing the trapped pilot. 'Nudger' Smith was to be the only combat fatality suffered by No 151 Wing during its brief sojourn in the Soviet Union.

Elsewhere along the Litsa front on that 12 September two other pilots of 1./JG 77 were credited with an I-16 *Rata* apiece. One provided the 13th victory for Oberfeldwebel Hugo Dahmer, still the *Gruppe's* leading scorer. The other was the first kill for newcomer and future Knight's Cross winner Unteroffizier Rudolf 'Rudi' Müller. He would subsequently emerge as the first of the Arctic's really outstanding aces, and one whose final

Bf 110s of 1.(Z)/JG 77 on deployment to Petsamo in October 1941. The machine in the foreground, 'LN+AR', is almost certainly the aircraft in which *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Felix-Maria Brandis was to lose his life four months later. Next in line is 'LN+ER', the mount of Leutnant Karl-Fritz Schlossstein, who would take Brandis' place at the head of the *Staffel*



A newly-promoted Oberleutnant Felix-Maria Brandis (right) and his wireless-operator/gunner Feldwebel Herbert Baus alongside the tail of one of their Bf 110s – purportedly 'LN+LR' – which displays all 14 of Brandis' confirmed kills (the last, a MiG-3 brought down over the Murmansk–Moscow railway line back on 29 November 1941)



eastern front total would be very nearly four times that achieved by the experienced Dahmer.

The *Zerstörer* of 1.(Z)/JG 77 were also in action along the Litsa. On 15 September another of the Russians' seemingly limitless supply of I-16s gave *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Felix-Maria Brandis his tenth kill of the war (his seventh in the Arctic), although another *Rata*, flown by Soviet ace Boris Safonov, claimed a Bf 110 in return. All three occupants – pilot Leutnant Heinz-Horst Hoffmann, wireless-operator/gunner Gefreiter Rudolf Böhm and Sonderführer Heinz Wenk, a war correspondent who had gone along to report on the *Staffel's* activities – lost their lives.

Forty-eight hours later a second clash between 1./JG 77 and a formation of Hurricanes of No 151 Wing close to the Litsa resulted in the loss of another of the *Staffel's* Bf 109s when a pilot of No 81 Sqn downed four-victory Feldwebel Franz Stiglmaier's 'Red 6'. And further mirroring the events of 12 September, Oberfeldwebel Hugo Dahmer and Unteroffizier Rudolf Müller again claimed a Polikarpov apiece. This time their victims were I-153 biplanes (their 30th and third successes, respectively).

On 25 September Generaloberst Jürgen Stumpff, the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) *Luftflotte* 5, visited Petsamo to award the Arctic front's second Knight's Cross to Oberleutnant Horst Carganico, the *Staffelkapitän* of 1./JG 77, for his then current total of 27 enemy aircraft destroyed.

Coincidentally, 25 September was also purportedly the date on which a Russian pilot first flew one of the Vaenga Hurricanes. This paved the



Feldwebel Theo Weissenberger claimed his first *Zerstörer* victory on 24 October 1941. He would add 22 more before converting to Bf 109s, with which he achieved even greater success. His final score of 208 by war's end places him among the top ten most successful fighter pilots in the annals of air combat

way for No 151 Wing to begin functioning in its primary intended role as a quasi-Operational Training Unit. A number of combat patrols and bomber escort missions would still be flown over the coming weeks, but the Wing's main task now was to teach Russian pilots to fly the Hurricanes and to train Russian groundcrews to service them. In little more than six weeks the remaining complement of Vaenga Hurricanes and all the Wing's ancillary equipment – down to the pilots' helmets and Mae Wests – had been handed over to the Soviets, who used this first manifestation of military aid from the west to form three Hurricane squadrons of their own. In November the personnel of No 151 Wing then returned to the United Kingdom aboard the cruiser HMS *Kenya*.

The RAF may have departed, but successive deliveries of Hurricanes directly to the Russians meant that the iconic British fighter would continue to appear on the scoresheets of the Luftwaffe's Arctic aces for the next two years and more.

As September gave way to October the approach of the Arctic winter meant that the hours of daylight were growing ever shorter. Operations suffered accordingly. During the course of October the *Gruppe* nonetheless managed to rack up 26 kills without loss to themselves, although one 14./JG 77 pilot lost his life in a crash caused by severe icing early in the month. At least eight of the month's successes were achieved by the Bf 110s of 1.(Z)/JG 77, seven of them on 24 October alone when the *Zerstörer* had a running fight with a mixed formation of I-16s and I-153s along the Litsa.

Staffelkapitän Oberleutnant Felix Brandis downed one of each type to take his overall score to a round dozen. Three more I-153s provided first kills for other members of the *Staffel*, among them relative newcomer Feldwebel Theodor Weissenberger. 'Theo', as he would soon become universally known, had joined 1.(Z)/JG 77 on 6 September. During his

12 months as a *Zerstörer* pilot he was to add 22 more enemy aircraft to his scoresheet. In September 1942 Weissenberger would convert to the single-engined Bf 109 and rapidly rise to become another of the Arctic front's most outstanding and successful aces. He ended the war flying the Me 262 jet as the *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 7, wearing the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross, and with a final overall total of 208 victories to his credit. Weissenberger retained his love of speed and excitement through the lean years of post-war Germany, only to be killed in an accident while competing at the famous Nürburgring motor-racing circuit in the summer of 1950.

While the Bf 110s of 1.(Z)/JG 77 were to spend almost all of October flying mostly in support of the ground fighting along the Litsa – deteriorating weather conditions and decreasing daylight hours permitting – the *Gruppe's* Bf 109s had already begun to migrate to the more southerly Finnish airfields astride the Arctic Circle. The first to make the move had been a small detachment from 1. *Staffel*, which was transferred the 250 kilometres or so down to Alakurtti in mid-September. Under the command of Oberfeldwebel Hugo Dahmer, this *Jagdkommando's* main task was to escort the Ju 87s of IV.(St)/LG 1 in their attacks on the Murmansk–Moscow railway and other targets in the area.

By the second week of October the rest of 1./JG 77 had joined Dahmer's little band at Alakurtti. Within days of their arrival, however, they received orders to retire to southern Norway for a well-earned rest and refit. Their place at Alakurtti was to be taken by Hauptmann Hans-Christian Schäfer's 13./JG 77, the changeover being completed by the end of the month.

On 30 October the Bf 110s of 1.(Z)/JG 77 also departed the far north, vacating Kirkenes for Rovaniemi. And early in November Major Hennig Strümpell's *Gruppenstab* followed in their footsteps. This effectively left Oberleutnant Franz Menzel's 14./JG 77 as the sole guardians of the Arctic Ocean front. Despite the ever worsening weather, the pilots of 14. *Staffel* continued to operate at every opportunity during the final two months of the year, their last recorded mission being to escort a formation of He 111 bombers to Murmansk on 31 December.

The *Staffeln* in the south were also keeping up the pressure on the vital Murmansk–Moscow rail link as 1941 neared its end. In order to reduce flying time to the target areas, half of 13./JG 77's machines were moved from Alakurtti to the forward landing ground at Kiestinki (Kestenga), which was little more than 50 kilometres from the railway line itself (although landing *ground* is perhaps something of a misnomer in this instance, as Kiestinki, which could only be used in the winter months, was simply a stretch of frozen lake). But successes were few, and the only known loss was a 13. *Staffel* pilot brought down by Soviet flak south of the road and rail junction at Loukhi on 29 November.

Compared to the drama being played out on the central sector of the eastern front, where, as 1941 drew to a close, German forces were being driven back from the gates of Moscow, events in the Arctic were perhaps little more than a sideshow. All that was about to change at the start of the new year, however, as the still somewhat haphazard nature of the Luftwaffe's northernmost fighter forces underwent complete reorganisation and a brand new *Jagdgeschwader* took to the stage.



CHAPTER TWO

1942 – ENTER JG 5

The New Year was only 72 hours old when *Jagdgeschwader* 5 first came into being. It was a protracted and complicated birth, however, and many months were to pass before the *Geschwader* attained its final form, which, uniquely, would see 50 per cent of its strength facing the Allies in the west and 50 per cent deployed against the Russians in the east. The first stage of the process was undoubtedly the most straightforward when, on 3 January 1942, I./JG 77 – commanded by Major Joachim Seegert and currently based in and around Stavanger, in southern Norway – was simply redesignated to become I./JG 5. This meant, of course, that Oberleutnant Horst Carganico's I./JG 77, recently returned to Stavanger-Sola for rest and refit after its four-month stint in the Arctic, would henceforth be operating as I./JG 5.

On this same 3 January Major Hennig Strümpell's *Stab* JGr.z.b.V. Petsamo shed its cumbersome title to emerge as II./JG 5. The *Gruppe*'s two component Bf 109 *Staffeln* – 13./JG 77 under Hauptmann Hans-Christian Schäfer, which had replaced Caganico's I./JG 77 in the Alakurti sector, and the far northern 'veterans' of Oberleutnant Franz Menzel's 14./JG 77 – became 4. and 5./JG 5, respectively. There was to have been a 6./JG 5 created from 15./JG 77, but as this latter existed on paper only, the 6. *Staffel* slot remained vacant for the time being.

Exactly one week after the creation of I. and II./JG 5, a *Geschwaderstab* was formed by the simple expedient of redesignating the *Stab* of the local *Jafü Norwegen* (Fighter-leader Norway). The *Jafü* himself, Oberst

Seen flying over Petsamo, the Bf 109E-7 of Hauptmann Günther Scholz (the first, if somewhat reluctant, *Gruppenkommandeur* of III./JG 5) displays a whole range of tactical, theatre, command and personal markings. These include a yellow lower cowl and rudder (the latter bearing some 30 victory bars, the majority of which had been gained during Scholz's earlier service with JG 54), a *Kommandeur*'s textbook chevron and triangle symbol, III. *Gruppe*'s badge below the windscreen and the pilot's personal motif – a cute, bare-bottomed toddler – beneath the cockpit (via Eddie Nielinger)



Leutnant Alfred Jakobi, seen here in the kapok lifejacket, had already claimed three RAF victims (including a Fortress I) over southern Norway prior to his service in the Arctic, where he was credited with JG 5's very first victory – a Hurricane downed on 1 January 1942. The figure in the foreground is Major Hennig Strümpell, the first *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 5

Hans-Hugo Witt, left for another post at the time of the changeover. It thus fell to his successor, Oberst Carl Schumacher of 'Battle of the German Bight' fame (see *Osprey Aircraft of the Aces 11 – Bf 109D/E Aces 1939-41*), to act both as the *Jafü Norwegen* and as caretaker commanding officer of JG 5 until the appointment of a permanent *Geschwaderkommodore*.

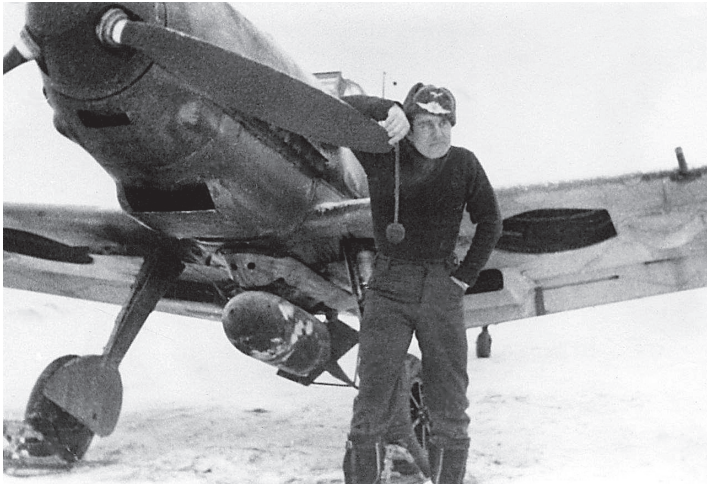
Luftwaffe planners may have been able to conjure up a completely 'new' *Jagdgeschwader* for service in the Arctic, but they could do nothing about the conditions its pilots and groundcrews would have to face there. 1942 had brought with it sub-zero temperatures (at times falling as low as -40°C), frequent heavy snowfalls and near constant darkness. At Petsamo there was a brief window of daylight around noon. Further south at Alakurtti the personnel of 4./JG 5 enjoyed all of 90 minutes of daytime visibility. Nevertheless, it was two pilots of 5./JG 5 up at Petsamo who scored the new

year's (and the new *Geschwader's*) first successes. Taking off shortly after 1100 hrs on 4 January to escort an Hs 126 on a reconnaissance mission over the frontlines along the Litsa, several of the *Staffel's* Bf 109s bumped into a force of more than 12 Russian-flown Hurricanes. Leutnant Alfred Jakobi and Unteroffizier Dietrich Weinitschke were credited with one of the enemy machines apiece for their seventh and third confirmed victories, respectively.

But such encounters were the exception rather than the rule under the prevailing conditions, and the pilots of Oberleutnant Menzel's 5. *Staffel* found themselves being employed more and more in the *Jabo*, or fighter-bomber role. With a 250 kg bomb slung beneath the belly of their *Emils* they were sent out to attack not only land targets, but also Soviet shipping in the Kola Inlet and surrounding waters. Delivering a bomb with accuracy is something of an exact science, however, and their inexperience showed. Results were not always impressive, especially against moving targets and – despite some hopeful but highly exaggerated claims – little material damage was inflicted upon the enemy's naval or merchant vessels.

Meanwhile, further to the south, shuttling between Alakurtti and Kiestinki, the Bf 109s of 4./JG 5 were tasked primarily with escorting Ju 87s attacking the stretch of the Murmansk–Moscow railway line that skirted the White Sea. The Red Air Force's determination to protect this vital supply link to the Russian interior inevitably resulted in a number of bitter dogfights, with losses being suffered on both sides. Unfortunately, details of most of these actions are sparse in the extreme.

Also operating in this sector at this time were the Bf 110s of 1.(Z)/JG 77. And on 24 January a mixed force from both *Staffeln* – four Bf 110s and seven Bf 109s – bounced a group of Soviet fighters patrolling the railway line some 80 kilometres east-northeast of Loukhi. Diving on the unsuspecting enemy aircraft from astern, one of the *Zerstörers* quickly claimed an 'I-18' (in actuality a LaGG-3) shot down near Boyarskaya. Five minutes later the same pilot was credited with a Hurricane, despatched in the same manner. These were kills number two and three for future ace Feldwebel Theo Weissenberger.



Oberleutnant Franz Menzel, the *Staffelkapitän* of 5./JG 5, pictured in front of a bomb-laden *Emil*. Despite their best efforts, the *Geschwader's* early attempts at fighter-bombing produced few results. This particular machine, 'Red 9', was lost on 26 February 1942 when future ace Unteroffizier Dietrich Weinitschke had to put it down on a frozen lake northwest of Murmansk

On 1 February the *Zerstörerstaffel* was officially made part of *Jagdgeschwader* 5 by being redesignated 6.(Z)/JG 5. This also happened to be the day that *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Felix-Maria Brandis returned from leave. His tenure of office in command of his renumbered *Staffel* proved brief, however, for Brandis was to lose his life just 24 hours later.

Despite the atrocious conditions on the morning of 2 February, Oberleutnant Brandis took off from Rovaniemi at the head of his *Staffel*. Each Bf 110 was carrying two 250 kg bombs beneath its fuselage. The unit's objective, as so often in the recent past, was once again the Murmansk railway. But as the *Zerstörer* approached the target area the weather closed in even more. Visibility was reduced to almost nil and the order was given to abort the mission. While the rest of the formation climbed up through the cloud layer before turning back to Rovaniemi, where all landed safely after jettisoning their bombs, Oberleutnant Brandis decided for some reason to attempt to put down at nearby Kiestinki. He was soon lost to sight as he descended into an area of snowstorms closely followed by his two wingmen.

It was a tragic error. All the machines came to grief before reaching the dubious safety of Kiestinki. The two wingmen, both future Arctic *Zerstörer* aces, luckily survived. Oberleutnant Max Franzisket made a smooth, if impromptu, belly-landing on the frozen surface of Lake Pya, and both he and his wireless-operator/gunner were unhurt. Leutnant Hans Kirchmeier hit the ground some distance to the southeast of Kiestinki and was pulled wounded from the wrecked Bf 110 by his crewman. Only a few hundred metres away the *Staffelkapitän* had not been so fortunate, 'LN+AR' breaking up on impact and Oberleutnant Brandis fracturing his skull. He was killed instantly. His wireless-operator/gunner was thrown clear and later found severely wounded and concussed.

With 14 kills to his credit – 11 of them achieved in the Arctic, the last being an 'I-18' downed on 29 November 1941 – Felix-Maria Brandis was the *Staffel's* highest scorer at the time of his death. In fact only one other Arctic *Zerstörer* pilot would surpass Brandis' final score, promising newcomer Feldwebel Theo Weissenberger.

The appalling weather that had contributed to Brandis' loss continued into the second week of February. However, in the latter half of the

month, conditions began to show signs of slight improvement. Ops were resumed from Rovaniemi and Kiestinki, and even the occasional success was recorded in renewed clashes with the enemy fighters. For example, on 19 February a *Kette* of Bf 109s of 4./JG 5 led by Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler tangled with six low-flying 'I-18s' close to the Murmansk railway line. At the end of a hectic ten-minute dogfight one Messerschmitt was missing, but Ehrler had added another kill to his growing scoreboard.

Two days later it was the turn of Knight's Cross-wearing Leutnant Hugo Dahmer. He was flying one of the six Bf 109s that were escorting a formation of Ju 87s in yet another attack on the Murmansk railway line when they were engaged by a superior force of Red Air Force Hurricanes. Two of the enemy machines were brought down. The one credited to Hugo Dahmer took his overall tally to 37. It was his 28th, and final, Arctic victory, for shortly thereafter he was posted away to serve as a fighter instructor. In December 1942 Dahmer returned briefly to JG 26 in the west, the unit with which he had scored his first nine kills, before then being transferred to JG 2 '*Richthofen*' a few weeks later. With his total standing at 45 enemy aircraft destroyed, Dahmer was seriously wounded on 10 October 1943 and spent the remainder of the war in various training roles, latterly as a specialist in R4M air-to-air rockets.

And when, on 25 February, the Bf 110s of 6.(Z)/JG 5, now commanded by Oberleutnant Karl-Fritz Schlossstein, escorted a formation of Ju 88 bombers to attack Kandalaksha – an important road and rail junction on the northwestern tip of the White Sea – it was again a gaggle of Soviet-flown Lend-Lease Hurricanes that challenged them. They fared even worse than their counterparts of four days earlier, losing three of their number in very short order. Two fell to the guns of Feldwebel Theo Weissenberger. The second of the pair, which came down alongside the railway line eight kilometres to

Snow-camouflaged Bf 109Fs from JG 5 provide close escort for well-weathered Ju 87Ds from I./StG 5. Note the heavy exhaust staining on the dive-bombers' fuselage sides. I./StG 5 was formed from IV./LG 1 in January 1942 (via Eddie Nielinger)





the south of Kandalaksha, was kill number five for Weissenberger. It gave him ace status and set him firmly on course for greater things.

The apparent improvement in the weather had already resulted in Major Hennig Strümpell leading elements of his *Gruppenstab II./JG 5* from Rovaniemi back up to Petsamo some two weeks earlier. And on 26 February the Bf 110s of 6.(Z)/JG 5 likewise departed Rovaniemi for Kirkenes, ready to resume their escort duties for the bombers and Stukas raiding Murmansk. This mass migration northwards may have been a trifle premature, however, for at the beginning of March the weather clamped down again and very little flying could be done until the second week of the month. Predictably, conditions were less severe to the south – a fact the Red Air Force took advantage of by carrying out two sneak bombing raids on 4./JG 5's base at Alakurtti.

Events in the far north were soon to overshadow the small-scale sparring between the opposing air forces that typified so much of the action fought along the Murmansk–Moscow railway line.

Since the six ships of the 'Dervish' trial convoy had successfully delivered the first consignment of western military aid to the Soviet Union in the early weeks of *Barbarossa*, no fewer than 11 of the now historic 'PQ' convoys had been despatched to Russia's Arctic ports (all those Hurricanes encountered by the pilots of JG 5 had to be coming from somewhere). In the four months from October 1941 to February 1942 a total of 87 merchantmen had battled the ferocious Arctic winter storms to deliver their much-needed supplies. Only one freighter had been lost (torpedoed by a U-boat). Indeed, on 12 March the 16 merchant vessels of PQ 12, which had sailed from Reykjavik, in Iceland, 12 days earlier, all put safely into Murmansk.

It was a situation the Germans could no longer afford to ignore. *Luftflotte 5* (Air Fleet 5, the command responsible for Scandinavia and the Arctic sector) was ordered to give top priority to anti-convoy operations. Its units were to attack the Allied convoys approaching northern Russia

The Petsamo operations block. This unassuming wooden hut was the nerve centre of Arctic fighter operations. Note the air-raid shelter to the left, a circular canvas and wood structure – commonly known as a 'Finnish tent' – buried up to its roof in the frozen ground. As the war progressed such bunkers were to see increasing use



Bf 109Es pictured in late April 1942 at Banak, the last stop on their long flight north to Petsamo (note the auxiliary belly tank). The unit badge just visible beneath the windscreen of the machine in the foreground identifies it as belonging to 7./JG 5. Somewhat unusually for Arctic theatre fighters, it also appears to be wearing a yellow aft fuselage band

as soon as they came within range, and bomb any ships that made it through to the Arctic ports. The figures reflect the change this new strategic policy would bring about. Between March and September the next six PQ convoys lost a total of 51 merchant vessels (34 of them to air attacks).

Lacking the necessary range, the short-legged fighters of II./JG 5 were unable to participate in the major convoy battles fought far out to sea (for fuller details of these actions see *Osprey Combat Aircraft 79 – Junkers Ju 88 Kampfgeschwader on the Russian Front* and *Osprey Combat Aircraft 100 – Heinkel He 111 Kampfgeschwader on the Russian Front*). Nevertheless, the Bf 109s were to play significant, if peripheral, roles in the campaign against the convoys throughout the summer of 1942. Firstly, they frequently provided fighter cover for the bombers and Stukas attacking the Allied vessels that had succeeded in reaching Murmansk. Secondly, and equally importantly, they protected the Luftwaffe bombers' own bases, which the Soviets had begun to raid at regular intervals in their efforts to minimise the danger to, and relieve the pressure on, the incoming convoys.

Initially, however, the Bf 109 presence in the far north – consisting of just one *Staffel* (5./JG 5, reinforced on occasion by detachments of 4./JG 5 flying up from Alakurtti) – was totally inadequate for the tasks ahead, and moves had to be made to remedy the situation. One of the first steps taken involved Oberleutnant Horst Carganico's 1./JG 5, currently languishing at Stavanger, in southern Norway, after its earlier Arctic service as 1./JG 77. On 21 March this *Staffel* underwent further redesignation to become 6./JG 5 and was then ordered to make its way back up to Petsamo as quickly as possible (in the event, conditions proved so bad that it took more than three weeks to complete the transfer).

To avoid the sort of confusion that had at times arisen due to the co-existence of both a 1./JG 77 and a 1.(Z)/JG 77 at the start of the campaign in the north, this filling of the hitherto vacant 6. *Staffel* slot led to 6.(Z)/JG 5 now being renumbered as 10.(Z)/JG 5. At the same time a totally new III. *Gruppe* was created by redesignating the recently formed IV./JG 1. Activated at Vannes, on the French Biscay coast, in January, and having participated in the hazardous 'Channel Dash' the following month,



The 'Polar Bear's Head' badge originally introduced by 14./JG 77 survived the unit's redesignation as 5./JG 5. It was with this *Staffel* that Unteroffizier (later Feldwebel) Artur Mendl scored all 8+ of his Arctic victories

this *Gruppe* – commanded by Hauptmann Günther Scholz (who, by all accounts, would much rather have remained in his post as *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 54 'Grünherz' on the Leningrad front) – was originally earmarked for coastal defence duties in the German Bight area. Such was the perceived threat posed by the Arctic convoys that at the end of February IV./JG 1 was ordered up to Trondheim, in Norway. And it was here, on 21 March, that the unit became III./JG 5 and began preparing to move to Petsamo.

It would be the latter half of April, however, before either 6./JG 5 or III./JG 5 were fully operational out of Petsamo. In the meantime, Oberleutnant Franz Menzel's 5. *Staffel* continued to soldier on alone as the only Bf 109 unit in the far north (although it frequently flew operations in conjunction with the *Zerstörer* of the now 10.(Z)/JG 5). 24 March saw two such missions, with both Bf 109s and Bf 110s providing fighter cover for Ju 87s attacking targets in the Murmansk area. A slightly more out-of-the-ordinary escort operation on this same date was entrusted to the Bf 109s alone when they were required to safeguard the personal Ju 52/3m transport of *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS, who was making a tour of inspection of the Arctic front. An eventful day was finally brought to a close with two emergency scrambles and the shooting down of two marauding Hurricanes, one of which opened the scoresheet of future ace Unteroffizier Artur Mendl.

On the last day of March the 14 surviving merchantmen of convoy PQ 13 arrived in Murmansk (five had been sunk en route from Iceland, two by aerial bombing). The vessels became an immediate magnet for the Luftwaffe's bombers and Stukas, and JG 5's fighters flew escort for many of the raids made on the berthed ships during the days that followed. On 3 April, during one such operation, Leutnants Friedrich Dahn and Heinrich Lesch of 5. *Staffel* were each credited with a Hurricane west of the Kola Inlet.

Six days later it was 5./JG 5 that had to bear the losses when six Bf 109s were engaged by Russian fighters to the south of Murmansk. Two of the *Staffel*'s Messerschmitts were brought down, both reportedly by deliberate ramming (these so-called 'Taran' attacks on Luftwaffe aircraft were a not infrequent occurrence during the early months of the air war in the east).

Both German pilots survived the experience, only to be captured by Russian troops after pulling off emergency landings. Only one of them, the six-victory Leutnant Alfred Jakobi, was to return home after more than seven years in Soviet captivity.

For the next few days, operations – or, more accurately, the lack thereof – were again dictated by the weather. The adverse conditions, low cloud and frequent snowstorms, were also preventing 6./JG 5 from completing the last leg of its circuitous journey from Norway, via northern Germany and the Baltic states, to the Arctic front. By 12 April Oberleutnant Horst Carganico's *Staffel* had reached Rovaniemi, but it would take a further 48 hours to get to Petsamo. When they finally did arrive, they provided a very welcome addition to the Luftwaffe's fighter strength in the far north. And not just in numbers, but in experience too, for in addition to Carganico himself, 6./JG 5's roster still included a number of pilots who had seen service in the area during the *Staffel's* earlier days as 1./JG 77 – most notable among them perhaps being Unteroffizier Rudolf 'Rudi' Müller. And although several of the unit's more experienced NCO pilots had been posted away while in Norway, their places had been taken by some very promising newcomers. Again, one name stands out among this group – that of future Knight's Cross winner Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich.

The Luftwaffe may have been slowly gathering its forces to counter the growing threat posed by the Allied convoys, but it was the Arctic weather – implacable enemy to both friend and foe alike – that proved the undoing of PQ 14. On 19 April seven of the 24 merchantmen that had set out from Iceland put into Murmansk. Of the others, only one – the *Empire Howard*, flying the flag of the convoy commodore – had been lost to enemy action, torpedoed by a U-boat. The remaining 16 vessels had been forced to return to Iceland owing to ice and the extreme conditions.

Three days after the seven ships of PQ 14 docked at Murmansk, the advance party of Hauptmann Günther Scholz's III./JG 5 touched down at Petsamo. Its arrival heralded the start of five months of hectic and sustained aerial activity as the Arctic spring turned into the Arctic summer and each side strove to gain supremacy over the other. For the Bf 109 pilots of II. and III./JG 5 in particular it was a period which was to see established aces adding steadily to their totals, newcomers claiming their first successes and the emergence of a handful of 'naturals' whose names soon began to dominate the *Geschwader's* scoreboard.

23 April set the pattern for many of the days that followed. A mixed force of Bf 109s and Bf 110s flying on an early morning escort mission for Ju 87s attacking Murmansk encountered a large number of Soviet fighters while still well short of the Litsa. A running dogfight ensued that lasted all the way to the target area. By its close the Germans had claimed 15 enemy aircraft destroyed. 6. *Staffel's* Unteroffizier Rudi Müller was credited with three of them – a brace of Hurricanes and a twin-engined SB-2 that had somehow got mixed up in the action. Oberfeldwebel Florian Salwender, also of 6./JG 5, attacked a Hurricane head-on over Murmansk and shot it down. This took his overall tally to 25. Salwender's own 'Yellow 11' had been so badly damaged by return fire from his doomed opponent, however, that he too had to bail out moments later. Picked up by Russian troops, Salwender was subsequently to die in Soviet captivity.

It would appear that the *Zerstörer* of 10.(Z)/JG 5 were also successful, with Oberfeldwebel Theo Weissenberger claiming a Hurricane and Leutnant Maul an 'I-180' (their 11th and second recorded victories, respectively).

Later that same morning a second escort mission, this time accompanying Ju 88 bombers to Murmansk, resulted in a further 11 claims. Rudi Müller got another Hurricane, plus an 'unidentified', which raised his total to 15. While the main weight of the morning's activities was undoubtedly focused on Murmansk, Oberleutnant Horst Carganico also found the time to take fellow *Staffelkapitän* Hauptmann Hans-Kurt von Sponeck of the newly arrived 7./JG 5 up on a familiarisation flight over the Litsa and surrounding areas. This quickly developed into something more serious when they spotted a pair of Hurricanes flying some 1000 metres below them. Under Carganico's expert direction, both enemy machines were promptly despatched in a textbook bounce, providing first kills for von Sponeck and his wingman Unteroffizier Werner Schumacher.

The following day saw another of JG 5's future aces open his scoresheet although, if his own later account of the incident is to be believed, Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich's first victory was not exactly 'textbook'. He was flying as part of the mixed Bf 109/Bf 110 escort for the Stukas that were again heading for Murmansk when, 'we bumped into four Hurricanes. I was flying wingman to the boss, but during the course of the scrap I lost contact with him (I had been told to stick close to him at all times). In the distance I saw a machine on its own. "There's my Hauptmann", I said to myself as I set off to catch up with him. At that moment I saw it was an English Hurricane. The belly radiator seemed enormous to me. Soon it was filling my entire gunsight. I started shooting.'

There was no let-up by either side as April neared its end. But the pilots of JG 5 clearly had the edge over their adversaries during the last week of the month as both personal and unit scores continued to rise.

On the morning of 25 April two Bf 110s of the Kirkenes-based 10.(Z)/JG 5 were scrambled to intercept a group of 12+ Soviet Pe-2 bombers reported in the area. After a lengthy search the *Zerstörer* sighted the enemy machines close to the Litsa. Oberfeldwebel Theo Weissenberger sent two of them down in flames before his own fighter was hit while attacking a third. Weissenberger nursed the smoking 'LN+BR' back over German lines, but unable to make it all the way to Kirkenes, he had to put the damaged Bf 110 down in an emergency landing south of Salmijärvi. The two Pe-2s had been kills 12 and 13 for Weissenberger. He did not claim, and was not credited with, the third Petlyakov he had attacked – he was too busy with problems of his own to watch it go down for a forced landing.



A close up of Hauptmann Scholz and his decidedly non-standard personal motif below the cockpit of his *Emil* (via Eddie Nielinger)

The Bf 109s of II. and III. *Gruppen* enjoyed even greater success 24 hours later. The first escort mission of 26 April, accompanying the Stukas to Murmansk yet again, culminated in a furious scrap with Hurricanes over the target area. At least five of the enemy machines were claimed, one of them giving newcomer Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels of 8./JG 5 his first Arctic success. Bartels had already achieved his first two kills on the Channel front. He would add a further 46 while serving with JG 5 – and be awarded the Knight's Cross in the process – before being posted to the Mediterranean in the summer of 1943. He was reported missing in action while flying in Defence of the Reich operations on 23 December 1944 with his final score standing at 99.

No fewer than three of the other Hurricanes were downed by *ex-Zerstörer* pilot Leutnant Friedrich Dahn, now flying Bf 109s as a member of 5. *Staffel*. These took his tally to 21, while the fifth, and final, recorded claim of the action was made by Dahn's wingman, Unteroffizier Dietrich Weinitschke.

A second Ju 87 escort mission was just getting underway later that same afternoon when a group of seven Petlyakov bombers was reported approaching from the southeast. Their objective was the Luftwaffe's main bomber base at Kirkenes, and the raid was stopped in its tracks when part of the Stukas' Bf 109 fighter escort peeled off to intercept the intruders and speedily accounted for all but two of them. The successful pilots, who were all or were soon to become Arctic aces, were Oberleutnants Horst Carganico and Hans Tetzner, Leutnant Friedrich Dahn (his fourth victory of the day), Oberfeldwebel Willi Pfränger and Unteroffizier Rudi Müller. Having effectively eliminated the threat to Kirkenes, most of the Bf 109 pilots then set off eastwards at full throttle to catch up with the Stuka raid on Murmansk. West of the target they bumped into a gaggle of Hurricanes, which allowed Horst Carganico, Rudi Müller and Willi Pfränger to each add an enemy fighter to their earlier Petlyakovs.

The following day, 27 April, was slightly less eventful, although a chance encounter with six Hurricanes east of Motovskiy Bay netted the *Geschwader* three more victories. One of these was number five for Unteroffizier Dietrich Weinitschke, while another became the first entry on the scoresheet of future ace Unteroffizier Richard Luy.

Although no major operations were flown by JG 5's fighters on 28 April, a number of small-scale skirmishes during the course of the day resulted in at least 12 Hurricanes having been shot down by its close. And, once again, the claimants were all names that were becoming increasingly familiar. Oberleutnants Horst Carganico and Hans Tetzner each got a brace of Hurricanes in a low-level dogfight over the waters of Motovskiy Bay, as too did Unteroffizier Werner Schumacher. The seemingly unstoppable Unteroffizier Rudi Müller went one better by claiming a trio, while Oberfeldwebel Willi Pfränger had to be content with just a single victory (although both he and Rudi Müller had been credited with a Hurricane apiece earlier in the day).

In the early hours of 29 April Soviet ground forces launched a surprise counter-offensive along the Litsa front. German troops immediately called for aerial support, and at first light the Bf 109s of JG 5 took off to escort Stukas to the sectors under greatest threat. More such missions, interspersed with ground-strafting sweeps directed against the advancing Russians, continued throughout much of the day. Details of the numerous

aerial encounters that took place – the enemy was reportedly up in force – are somewhat meagre, but what is on record is that 6./JG 5 clashed with a mixed formation of Hurricanes and I-153s west of Litsa Bay early in the afternoon. Eight Soviet machines were claimed, *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Horst Carganico and Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich accounting for an I-153 each, while Oberfeldwebel Willi Pfränger was credited with three of the stubby Polikarpov biplanes. Unteroffizier Rudi Müller's bag comprised a brace of Hurricanes and a single I-153.

Meanwhile, to the south, Oberleutnant Christian Schäfer's 4./JG 5 had been keeping up pressure on the Murmansk–Moscow railway line. On the last day of April near Loukhi, for example, the *Staffel* claimed the destruction of an entire formation of six Hurricanes, one of which fell to Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler.

The tempo of operations would increase even more in May. The arrival of two Allied convoys during the month meant that the Red Air Force's spoiling raids on the Luftwaffe's three major bases in the far north – Petsamo, Kirkenes and Banak – grew in frequency and intensity. And this, in turn, resulted in JG 5's fighters having to divide their time and energies between escort missions to Murmansk and the defence of their own airfields. At least four future aces gained their first successes during May, but on the debit side the month saw the loss of two of the *Geschwader's* current highest scorers. It also witnessed some significant changes – changes in command and changes in equipment.

With the war against the Soviet Union now almost a year old, JG 5 was the only *Jagdgeschwader* on the eastern front still flying the Bf 109E. The other six or so *Jagdgruppen* that had been equipped with *Emils* at the start of *Barbarossa* had long since converted to the more powerful Bf 109F, or *Friedrich*. Now it was finally time for JG 5 to follow suit. At the beginning of May Major Hennig Strümpell, *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 5, flew down to Pori, in southern Finland, with several of his pilots to begin re-equipping with Bf 109Fs. The remainder of the *Gruppe* was then sent down to Pori at intervals and in similarly small batches to do likewise. The conversion process would thus take very nearly the whole month, and long before its completion Major Strümpell had received orders to return to Germany to set up a new fighter training school. His place as *Kommandeur* of II. *Gruppe* was taken by Oberleutnant Horst Carganico, the long-serving *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 5.

While II. *Gruppe* was undergoing its piecemeal conversion at Pori, Hauptmann Günther Scholz's III./JG 5, whose *Gruppenstab* had flown in to Petsamo only days earlier, had to travel even further south, to Oslo-Gardemoen, in Norway, to take delivery of and retrain on its new Bf 109Fs.

In mid-May Oberst Schumacher's caretaker command came to an end with the arrival in Kirkenes of JG 5's first officially appointed *Geschwaderkommodore*. Major Gotthard Handrick was well known not only in Luftwaffe circles, but also in the world of sport – he had won gold in the modern pentathlon at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. A veteran of the *Legion Condor* in Spain, where he had been credited with five Republican aircraft destroyed, the ambitious Handrick was something of a controversial figure. Not particularly well liked, he had his own idiosyncratic ideas on tactics. Apparently, Handrick was of the opinion



It would seem that JG 5 was not particularly well served by some of its early commanders. Gerhard Schaschke had turned down the opportunity to head the *Zerstörerstaffel*, while Günther Scholz had been loath to leave JG 54 to become *Kommandeur* of III. *Gruppe*. And, by all accounts, Major Gotthard Handrick (pictured here at Petsamo in June 1942), the officer selected to be the *Geschwader's* first official *Kommodore*, was not overly popular with many members of the unit



The port of Murmansk and its clutch of surrounding airfields were focal points for many of JG 5's early operations. The *Geschwader's* Bf 109s and Bf 110s escorted numerous bomber and Stuka raids on these targets

that the best way to control his unit was not by leading from the front but by keeping a careful eye on his pilots from the rear!

One of the victims of Göring's ruthless cull of older fighter *Geschwaderkommodores*, Handrick had been replaced as the head of JG 26 by the more youthful Adolf Galland at the height of the Battle of Britain. He later commanded JG 77, with whom he scored the first of his handful of victories on the eastern front (exact number unknown). After a year's service as *Kommodore* of JG 5, the 'well-connected' Gotthard Handrick would see out the rest of the war in a number of senior staff and command appointments. At the close of hostilities he was commanding 8. *Jagddivision*, which was not as elevated a position as it might sound, for by the time of the German surrender this 'division' in fact consisted of just one single nightfighter *Staffel*!

But enough about JG 5's domestic affairs – what of its operational activities?

On 5 May the 22 merchantmen of PQ 15 put in to Murmansk. The convoy had lost only three of its number en route from Iceland (all to aerial attacks) and this was the greatest concentration of Allied shipping yet to arrive in northern Russia. As was to be expected, it attracted the full fury of the Luftwaffe. A series of heavy bomber and Stuka raids was mounted against Murmansk, all requiring escort by the fighters of JG 5. Despite this, unloading continued apace and the bulk of the supplies delivered by PQ 15 were soon being transported south along the Murmansk–Moscow railway. Here, they were subjected to further Stuka attacks, escorted now by the Alakurtti-based 4./JG 5.



But it was in the far north that the main action continued to be fought. In the late afternoon of 9 May 6./JG 5 intercepted a group of twin-engined SB bombers to the southwest of Motovskiy Bay. Oberleutnant Horst Carganico and Oberfeldwebel Willi Pfränger each hacked a P-40 from the bombers' mixed escort of Hurricanes and 'Tomahawks'. Not long afterwards 7./JG 5 also encountered a mixed formation of P-40s and Hurricanes during another sweep over the Litsa front. They too were credited with two of the P-40s destroyed. Both were first kills for the two NCO pilots of 7. *Staffel* that were involved in the action, one of whom, Oberfeldwebel Franz Dörr, would go on to add 121 more to emerge at war's end as the *Geschwader's* fourth-highest scorer.

Bf 110 'LN+KR' of the *Zerstörerstaffel* over the shores of the Kola Inlet

10 May was to prove an even more lucrative day for JG 5. Numerous sorties were flown, resulting in no fewer than 27 enemy aircraft destroyed. Oberfeldwebel Willi Pfränger claimed five Hurricanes, which makes him a strong contender as the Arctic's first 'five-in-one-day' ace. Oberleutnant Horst Carganico was not far behind with three, while Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels added a second kill to his eastern front scoreboard. However, it was the *Zerstörerstaffel*, uncharacteristically, which claimed the lion's share of the losses inflicted upon the enemy on 10 May. In fact, this was to prove the most successful day in the unit's entire history (irrespective of its designation), with claims for 16 aircraft downed. The *Staffel* even had a candidate of its own for 'five-in-one-day' aceddom after Oberfeldwebel Theo Weissenberger was credited with three MiG-3s and a pair of Hurricanes all in the space of just 12 minutes, the last of them – one of the MiGs – timed at 1657 hrs. It is not known precisely when the last of Willi Pfränger's five Hurricanes went down. (*Text continues on page 41*).



1

Bf 110E-2 'M8+YE' of Hauptmann Gerhard Schaschke, 1.(Z)/JG 77, Kirkenes, Norway, July 1941



2

Bf 109E-7 'White 7' of Oberfeldwebel Hugo Dahmer, 1./JG 77, Petsamo, Finland, August 1941



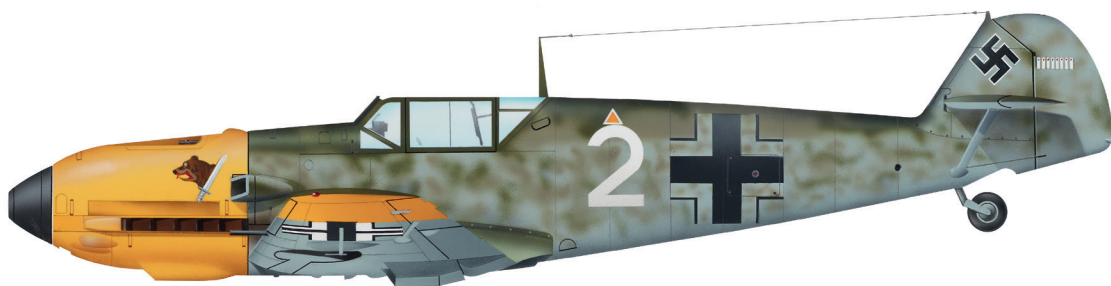
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Bf 109E-7 'White 11' of Oberleutnant Horst Carganico, *Staffelkapitän* 1./JG 77, Petsamo, Finland, autumn 1941



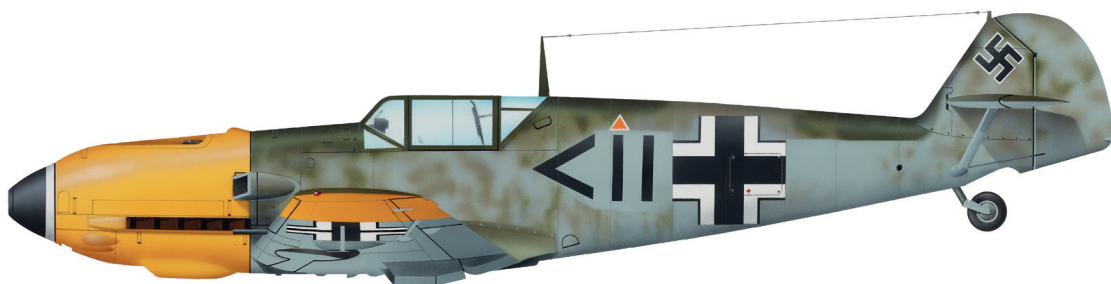
4

Bf 110E-2 'LN+LR' of Oberleutnant Felix-Maria Brandis, *Staffelkapitän* 6.(Z)/JG 5, Kirkenes, Norway, winter 1941-42



5

Bf 109E 'White 2' of Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler, 4./JG 5, Alakurtti, Finland, March 1942



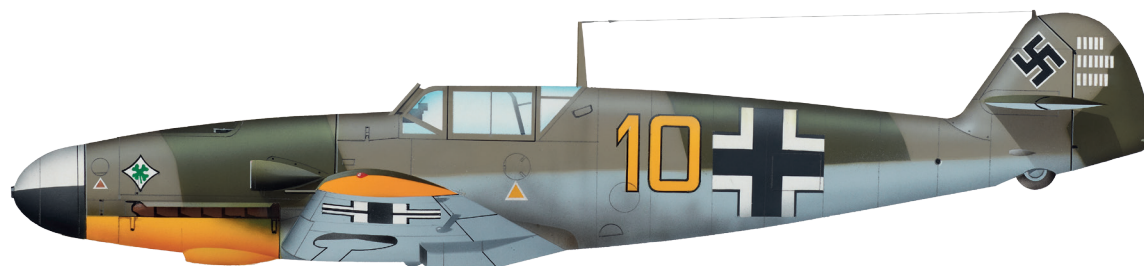
6

Bf 109E 'Black Chevron and Bars' of Feldwebel Leopold Knier, 6./JG 5, Kirkenes, Norway, April 1942



7

Bf 109F-4 'Yellow 7' of Feldwebel Albert Brunner, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, June 1942



8

Bf 109F-4 'Yellow 10' of Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, June 1942



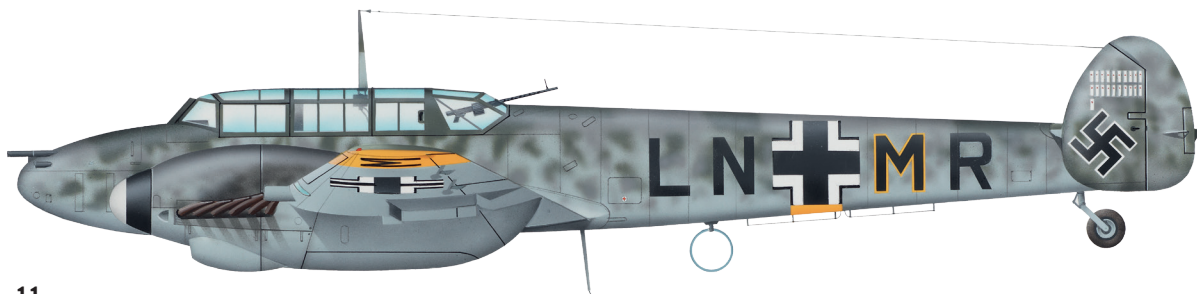
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Bf 109E 'Black 13' of Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, June 1942



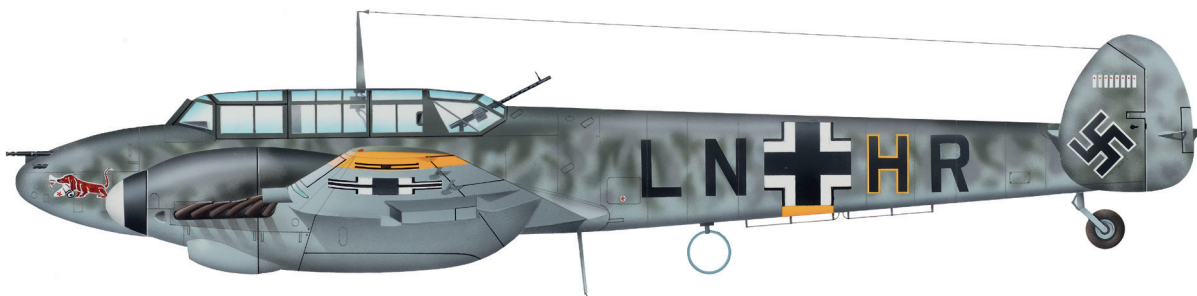
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Bf 109E-7 'Black 8' of Unteroffizier Josef Kaiser, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, June 1942



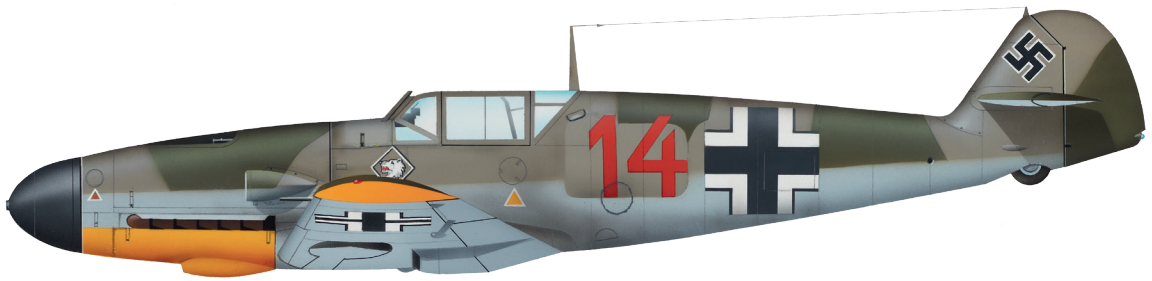
11

Bf 110F-2 'LN+MR' of Oberfeldwebel Theodor Weissenberger, 10.(Z)/JG 5, Kirkenes, Norway, June 1942



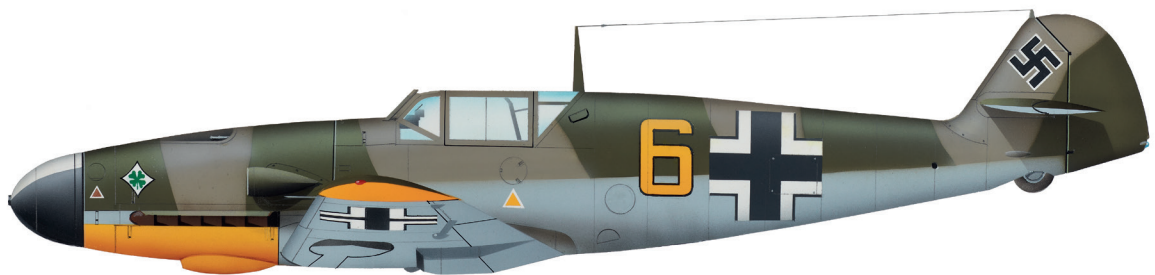
12

Bf 110E-2 'LN+HR' of Oberfeldwebel Karl Munding, 13.(Z)/JG 5, Kirkenes, Norway, July 1942



13

Bf 109F-4 'Red 14' of Unteroffizier Dietrich Weinitschke, 5./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, July 1942



14

Bf 109F-4 'Yellow 6' of Oberleutnant Hans-Dieter Hartwein, *Staffelkapitän* 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, July 1942



15

Bf 109F-4 'Yellow 12' of Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, July 1942



16

Bf 109F-4 'Black Chevron and Triangle' of Hauptmann Horst Carganico, *Gruppenkommandeur* II./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, summer 1942



17

Bf 109E 'White 14' of Unteroffizier Helmut Neumann, 7./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, late summer 1942



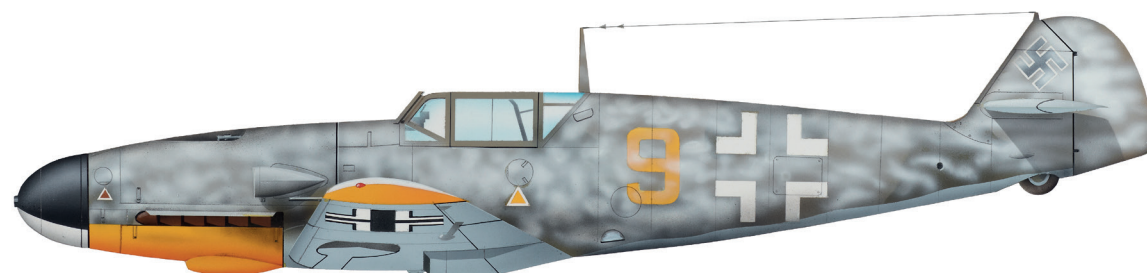
18

Bf 109F 'Black 13' of Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, September 1942



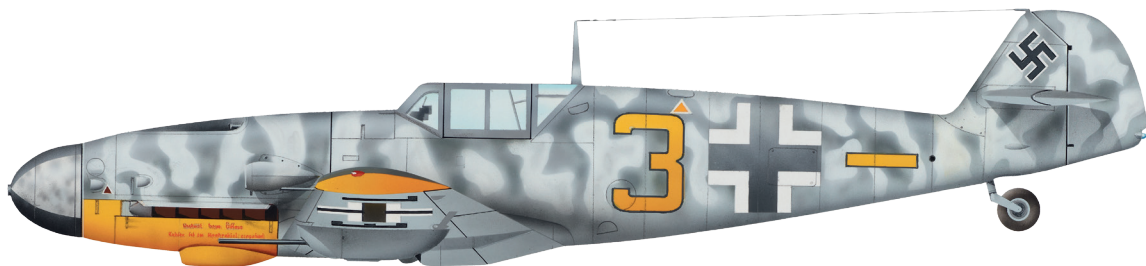
19

Bf 109F-4 'Yellow 12' of Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, autumn 1942



20

Bf 109F 'Yellow 9' of Unteroffizier Walter Schuck, 9./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, winter 1942-43



21

Bf 109G-2/R6 'Yellow 3' of Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Müller, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, March 1943



22

Bf 109F-4 'Black 4' of Feldwebel Ernst Schulze, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, March 1943



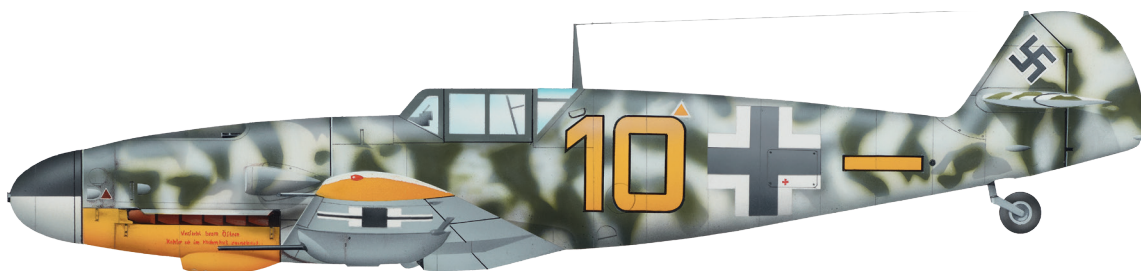
23

Bf 109G-2 'Black 14' of Unteroffizier Rudolf Mayer, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, April 1943



24

Bf 109G-2/R6 'Micky-Maus' of Hauptmann Horst Carganico, *Gruppenkommandeur* II./JG 5, Salmijärvi, Finland, spring 1943



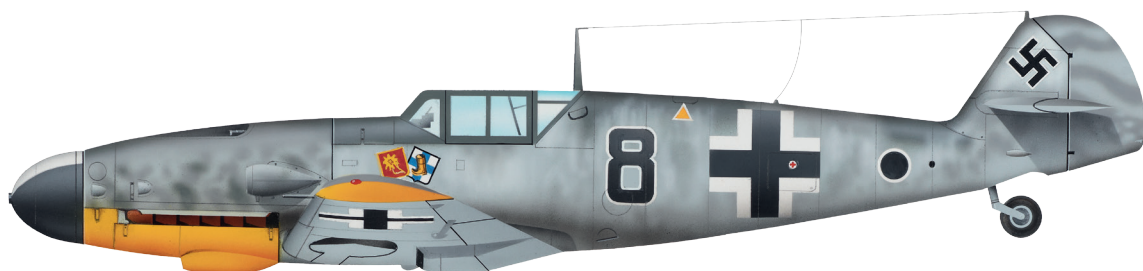
25

Bf 109G-2/R6 'Yellow 10' of Feldwebel Hans Döbrich, 6./JG 5, Salmijärvi, Finland, spring 1943



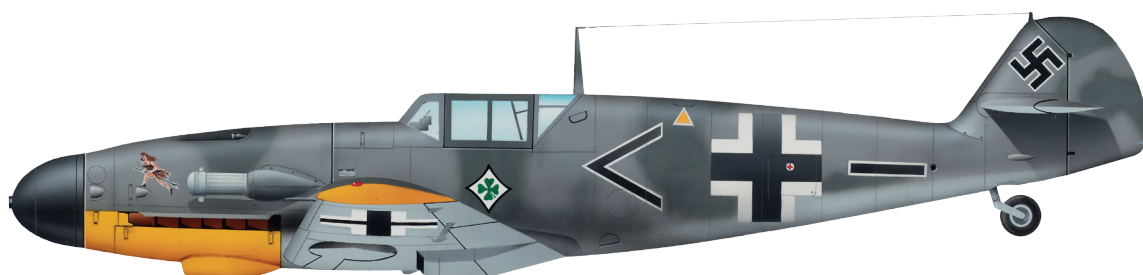
26

Bf 109G-2/R6 'Yellow 4' of Leutnant Theodor Weissenberger, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, May 1943



27

Bf 109G-2 'Black 8' of Feldwebel Jakob Norz, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, June 1943

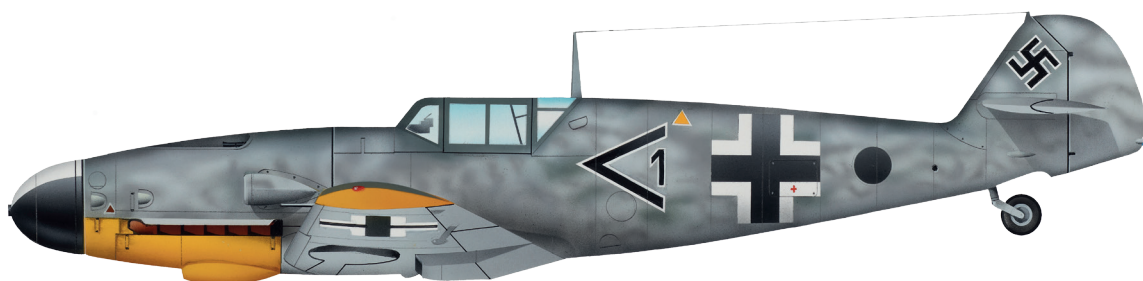


28

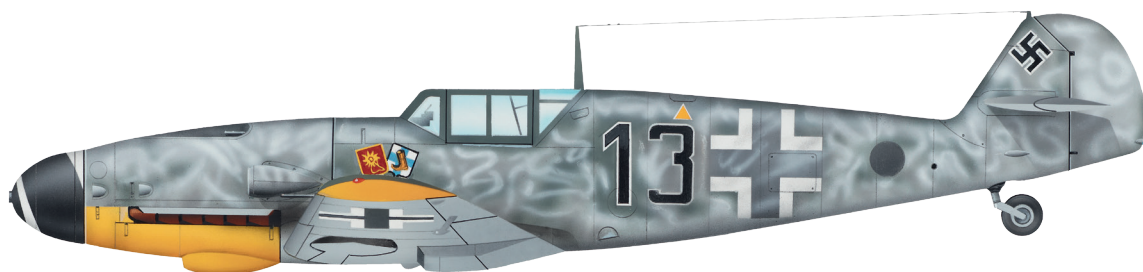
Bf 109G-2 'Black Chevron' of Oberleutnant Günther Schwanecke, *Gruppen-Adjutant* II./JG 5, Salmijärvi, Finland, August 1943



29
Bf 109G-2 'Black 1' of Oberleutnant Franz Wienhusen, *Staffelkapitän* 5./JG 5, Svartnes, Norway, August 1943



30
Bf 109G-2 'Black Chevron 1' of Leutnant Lorenz Andresen, *Gruppen-Adjutant III.*/JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, autumn 1943



31
Bf 109G-2 'Black 13' of Leutnant Hans-Bruno Diepen, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, late 1943



32
Bf 109G-2 'Black 9' of Oberfeldwebel Josef Kunz, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, winter 1943-44

This was 10.(Z)/JG 5's second brush with the enemy in the Litsa Bay area on this date. In the first engagement, shortly after midday, Oberfeldwebel Karl Munding and Unteroffizier Reinhold Fiedler had claimed a Hurricane apiece. They then downed two enemy fighters each in the second encounter – a MiG-3 and a Hurricane for Munding, two Hurricanes for Fiedler – which took their scores up to five and six, respectively. Another pilot accounted for a MiG-3 and a Hurricane in this same action. These were the first two successes for future ace Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Kurpiers.

Although JG 5 was taking a constant toll of the Soviets' far northern air and naval air forces, the *Geschwader* was not entirely immune to losses itself. These were, however, on a much smaller scale. And while it had been more than eight months since the *Zerstörerstaffel*'s last combat fatalities, 9 and 10 May had each witnessed the loss of a Bf 109 (with both pilots reportedly disappearing into Soviet captivity).

An escort mission to Murmansk late in the afternoon of 14 May again resulted in a ferocious dogfight, this time with a mixed formation of close on 50 enemy fighters. When it was over Oberfeldwebel Willi Pfränger had added another pair of Hurricanes to the singleton he had downed earlier in the day and *Gruppenkommandeur* Oberleutnant Horst Carganico had disposed of a Tomahawk. Among the other claimants were Feldwebel Heinz Beyer and Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels, who had each despatched a Hurricane.

Just over 24 hours later, in the early evening of 15 May, the Bf 109s and Bf 110s of JG 5 were once more heading towards Murmansk, on this occasion escorting a formation of Ju 88s, when they were again confronted by a large force of assorted Soviet fighters over Litsa Bay. In a ten-minute running battle stretching all the way to the target area, the pilots of JG 5 claimed 13 enemy aircraft shot down. Repeating his performance of the previous day, Willi Pfränger bagged another brace of Hurricanes. Unteroffizier Werner Schumacher also got a pair – a Hurricane and a MiG-3 (the former being his fifth victory, thereby qualifying him as an ace). Those credited with single Hurricanes during the course of the wide-ranging dogfight included Oberleutnant Horst Carganico, Unteroffizier Heinz Bartels, Oberfeldwebel Franz Dörr and Feldwebel Leopold Knier. The latter's Hurricane was the first of six kills he would claim while flying with JG 5.

A matter of only minutes after Knier's success, albeit some distance away over the Litsa front, another of the *Geschwader*'s NCO pilots also opened



Marked with a 'Black Chevron', a new Bf 109F of II./JG 5 lands at Petsamo in the summer of 1942



his scoresheet. It proved to be something of a botched encounter, but the engagement taught the young Unteroffizier some valuable lessons, as he himself later admitted;

‘Then suddenly I saw them off to the right below us – a group of Russian fighters patrolling above the tundra at a height of about 1000 metres. “‘White 6’ here, *Indianer* [enemy fighters], 90 degrees, 1000!’

‘No reply from the *Staffel* leader. He seemed not to have heard me for he gave no acknowledgement, but just kept on flying straight ahead. What a time for his radio to go on the blink. Oh well, forget about permission. I signalled across to my wingman, tipped the machine onto its right wing, pushed the throttle forward and headed downwards. A quick glance at the altimeter – 1800 metres – then I concentrated again on the Russian fighters. Another quick check of the altimeter – 1500 metres. By this time my Me 109 had picked up so much excess speed in the steep dive that I started to worry about overshooting my slower opponents. I eased off the throttle and tried to bring her nose up, but despite using every ounce of strength I had, the elevators were extremely heavy and sluggish.

‘After pulling out at about 500 metres, I finally got my machine under control again and the Messerschmitt began to climb. I was furious with myself. I had practically presented myself on a plate to the enemy, and it was only their lack of performance that prevented them from making mincemeat of me. From their long engine cowlings I took them to be MiG-3s, accompanied by a few Hurricanes.

‘While several of the MiGs tried to get above us, the Hurricanes were forced to form a defensive circle. I was now squeezing every bit of power I could out of the Daimler-Benz engine. As I headed towards the MiGs they broke in all directions. I picked out a target and opened fire at a range of 50 metres. The MiG sheared away, but I reduced speed and stayed with him. When I had him bang in my sights again, I aimed at his tail and let fly with everything I had. As I had by now closed in to within about 30 metres of the MiG, I could see my rounds exploding all over its rear fuselage.

Rudi Müller's trusty 'Yellow 3' is already showing signs of wear as he taxis out for yet another sortie. Note the square ports in the leading edges of both wings for the gun cameras, which recorded his many successes



A beaming Unteroffizier Walter Schuck pictured on his return from the mission of 15 May 1942 that saw him gain his first victory – a low-flying MiG-3 attacking German troops on the Litsa front. It was an event that earned Schuck the Iron Cross, Second Class, and an experience that taught him some valuable lessons

At first nothing at all happened. The MiG continued to fly straight and level for a while, then it lazily turned over onto its back and went down vertically pouring black smoke before smashing itself to pieces on the tundra.

‘The fight had brought me back down close to the ground again and only now did I realise that I was flying far too slowly. Suddenly, fiery lines of tracer shot past my cockpit window. I broke left, and when the firing stopped I looked behind me. All that I could see was another Me 109 – my wingman Steinbach! Had he mistaken my machine for a Russian fighter? More than a little annoyed, I yelled at him over the R/T, “Richard, stop shooting at me!”

“That wasn’t me – I’ve just shot the other MiG off your tail”, Steinbach calmly replied.

‘Although I had just scored my first victory, I derived no real pleasure from the fact. Instead, I kicked myself for my carelessness, and went over the fight again and again in my mind, fully aware that it could well have been my last. “That was one hell of a close shave,” I thought to myself, “and if it hadn’t been for Steinbach.”

‘It was clear to me that I had made every stupid beginner’s mistake in the book; I had forgotten to watch my tail and had neglected to keep an eye on my height and speed.’

It was a lesson the diminutive but dynamic Walter Schuck never forgot. He would go on to amass a total of 171 confirmed kills during his time of service with JG 5 in the Arctic, making him the *Geschwader’s* joint highest scorer, before adding a further ten victories – eight of them while flying the Me 262 jet – by war’s end. Some sources, including Schuck’s own autobiography, make mention of another 25 Arctic kills achieved during the 1943-44 period. These were witnessed by naval personnel, presumably aboard the numerous coastal convoys’ surface escorts, who forwarded the details to Berlin, where they were scrutinised by the RLM and reportedly substantiated retroactively in November 1944. If this is the case, then it puts Walter Schuck among very august company indeed as one of only 15 ‘double-centurions’ ever produced by the Luftwaffe.

By an odd coincidence, the action of 15 May had also provided the first foot on the ladder for another young Unteroffizier who was to become one of the true Arctic ‘greats’. Little more than ten minutes after Schuck had finally despatched his MiG-3 to the northwest of Murmansk, Unteroffizier Jakob Norz downed a Hurricane in the same general area south of Ura Guba. This was victory number one for ‘Jockl’ Norz who, unlike Walter Schuck, would not survive the war, but whose total of 104 at the time of his death in September 1944 had taken him to fifth place in the *Geschwader’s* rankings.

But, such are the vagaries of war, that just as two stellar careers were beginning, another of great promise was about to come to a close. Late in the afternoon of 16 May Oberfeldwebel Willi Pfränger claimed his 30th (and what was destined to be his last) kill of the war – a Hurricane sent down in flames some 25 kilometres north-northwest of Murmansk. The following morning he was in his usual position flying as wingman to Oberleutnant Horst Carganico as the Bf 109E/Fs and Bf 110s of JG 5 set out to escort yet another Stuka raid on Murmansk. Shortly before reaching its objective the German formation was attacked by more than 20 Hurricanes. The raiding force scattered and soon it was every man for himself as the encounter

degenerated into a wild, swirling melee of individual dogfights. In one of these Leutnant Friedrich Dahn was able to down a trio of Hurricanes. But elsewhere Oberleutnant Horst Carganico became separated from his wingman, and when Oberfeldwebel Willi Pfränger failed to return to Petsamo, aircraft were immediately sent out to search for him. No trace of either Pfränger or his machine were to be found.

In fact, Willi Pfränger had been forced to bail out of his blazing *Friedrich*. Coming to earth some 18 kilometres west of Murmansk, he was quickly rounded up by Russian troops. But his story does not end there. Unlike so many other Luftwaffe flyers who simply vanished into Soviet captivity, Willi Pfränger was subjected to a lengthy and gruelling period of interrogation. The stories he fabricated while undergoing brutal questioning finally convinced his captors that he was a suitable candidate for ‘turning’. It was suggested that he could expect much more humane treatment if he were to agree to act as a spy for the Soviets. It was an offer he could hardly refuse, and in 1943 Willi Pfränger, wearing an infantry uniform, was dropped by parachute behind German lines on the central sector of the main eastern front. Having not the slightest intention of honouring the pact he had made with his erstwhile captors, Pfränger promptly gave himself up to the first German troops he encountered – only to face yet more harsh questioning from his own countrymen.

It was only after Oberleutnant Horst Carganico flew down from the Arctic to identify and vouch for him that Willi Pfränger’s extraordinary story was believed. He could not risk capture a second time, however, and so instead of returning to operational flying, Pfränger was seconded as a works pilot to the Ago aircraft factory at Oschersleben, which was heavily involved in the licence-production of Focke-Wulf Fw 190s.

Willi Pfränger’s disappearance was keenly felt, but operations continued unabated, allowing the *Geschwader*’s established ‘names’ ample opportunity to add yet further to their already considerable scores. During an escort mission over the Kola Inlet on the morning of 18 May, for example, Feldwebel Rudi Müller downed four Hurricanes. Other claimants included Unteroffiziere Hans Döbrich and Werner Schumacher. And it was during the course of this same action that future ace Unteroffizier Hemlut Klante was credited with his first victory. Later that evening Hauptmann Günther Scholz, the *Kommandeur* of III. *Gruppe*, brought down a Hurricane to the west of Murmansk. It was his third Arctic kill, and his 30th overall.

The following day, 19 May, saw further successes, with Rudi Müller again claiming the lion’s share. He despatched another three Hurricanes, while Oberleutnant Horst Carganico and Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich got two apiece. Leutnant Friedrich Dahn and his wingman Unteroffizier Dietrich Weinitschke claimed a single Hurricane each, and Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels was credited with a MiG-3.

On 25 May Dahn and Weinitschke were again aloft – on this occasion flying escort to a formation of *Jabos* (fighter-bombers) sent out to attack shipping in the Murmansk region – when they were bounced by six patrolling enemy fighters. Wingman Unteroffizier Weinitschke reportedly shot down a Hurricane during the ensuing melee, but in so doing lost sight of his leader. Although they made brief radio contact, the pair were



Pictured here as an Oberfeldwebel, Albert Brunner of 6./JG 5 scored his first victory – a Hurricane downed south of Nautsi – as a Feldwebel on 29 May 1942

The fighting on 28 May was more intense than usual, encompassing as it did not only morning and afternoon Stuka escort missions to Murmansk, but also a number of emergency scrambles in response to renewed Soviet raids on Kirkenes and Banak. These attacks on the Luftwaffe's main bomber bases (Kirkenes was currently housing well over 100 Ju 88s of KG 30) could mean only one thing – another Allied convoy was approaching northern Russia. In fact, the ships of PQ 16, which had sailed from Iceland on 21 May, had been spotted by a Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft in the early hours of 25 May. This marked the beginning of a protracted running battle which, with only brief intervals, was to last for five consecutive days. By its end seven merchantmen had been sent to the bottom, all but one having succumbed to aircraft bombs or torpedoes.

The majority of the enemy aircraft brought down on 28 May were again claimed by the *Geschwader's* established aces. However, over the course of the next three days at least five of the unit's newer pilots notched up their first kills. And two of these five would subsequently go on to join the small but select band of JG 5's semi-centurions.

With spring now giving way to summer, it was light for almost 24 hours a day above the Arctic Circle. And the orb of the sun was still creeping low along the horizon when ex-flying instructor Feldwebel Albert Brunner, now of 6./JG 5, was ordered up on an emergency scramble from Petsamo shortly before midnight on 29 May. He returned to base some time later with a Hurricane under his belt – the first of the 53+ victories he would achieve during his operational career with JG 5.

The following afternoon, 30 May, 19 merchantmen of convoy PQ 16 passed Kildin Island at the entrance to the Kola Inlet on the last leg of their voyage to Murmansk. It was at this point that JG 5 entered the fray by escorting Stuka strikes on the Allied ships as they made their way south along the inlet towards their final destination. Although the *Geschwader's* part in the five-day battle against PQ 16 may have been confined to its closing stages, it did result in a further clutch of Hurricanes being added to the unit's collective scoreboard. And among the usual names of those claiming kills was another relative newcomer.

The first kill for 8. *Staffel's* Unteroffizier Rudolf Linz was also a Hurricane, shot down close to the Soviet airfield at Murmashi, south-southwest of Murmansk, on 30 May 1942



Like Feldwebel Albert Brunner, Unteroffizier Rudolf Linz would also take his final tally to above the 50 mark and later be honoured with a posthumous Knight's Cross for so doing.

30 May was also noteworthy for the disappearance of the Soviets' highest-scoring Arctic ace, *Podpolkovnik* (Lieutenant Colonel) Boris Safonov. Although Safonov's list of kills included four Bf 109s and a single Bf 110, these had all been claimed during the latter half of 1941 prior to the activation of JG 5. Almost half of his victories were reportedly made up of Ju 88 bombers, and it was while attacking a formation of Junkers 'twins' that Safonov's Kittyhawk was shot into the sea off Kildin.

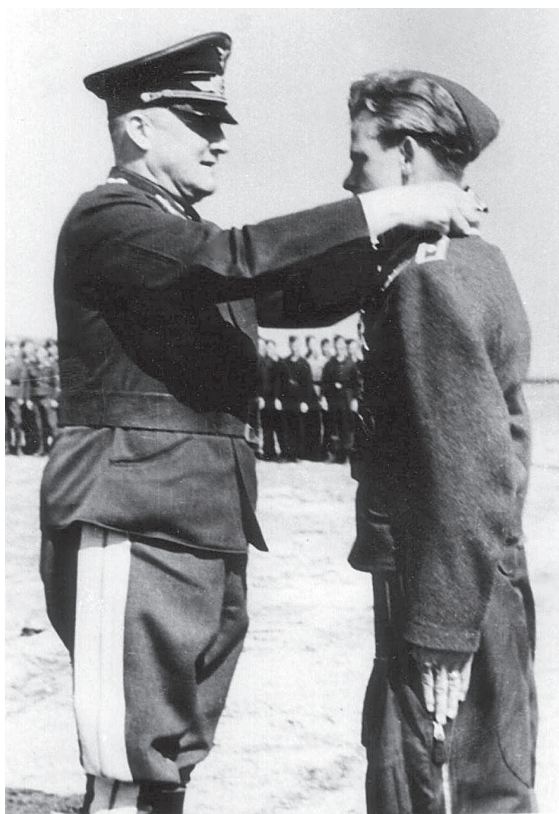
At least two Stuka escort missions were flown to Murmansk on 31 May, but it was not until shortly before midnight that the first recorded claims of the day were made. These followed an emergency scramble to repel a Soviet bombing raid on Petsamo. Seven enemy aircraft were brought down during the chase back across the Russian border, with Feldwebel Rudi Müller getting a Pe-2 and Unteroffizier Dietrich Weinitschke being credited with two of the bombers' escorting P-40s.

On 1 June the seven ships of PQ 16 that had continued on eastwards past the Kola Inlet put into Archangel, their port of destination on the far shore of the White Sea. But the Luftwaffe was still concentrating all its efforts on Murmansk. In the second of that day's escort missions to the battered harbour town JG 5's *Staffeln* became embroiled with a large mixed force of Soviet fighters. During the course of the fight Oberleutnant Horst Carganico claimed an I-16 and a P-40, while Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler downed a Hurricane. Another P-40 provided Oberfeldwebel Theo Weissenberger of the *Zerstörerstaffel* with his 21st victory to date.

The bombing was by no means all one way, however, and the increasing tenor of Soviet raids on Kirkenes and Banak necessitated the strengthening of these two airfields' fighter defences. Hitherto, they had housed only a token fighter presence – mainly pilots newly posted to JG 5 getting their first taste of Arctic flying before joining one of the operational *Staffeln* at Petsamo. But now a detachment from 6./JG 5 was transferred back from Petsamo to Kirkenes, while a similar small *Kommando* from the Alakurtti-



JG 5's Arctic air war was not all victories and decorations. By mid-1942 the *Geschwader* was beginning to suffer a slow but steady trickle of losses. Not every pilot shot down behind enemy lines ended up in Soviet captivity, however, with a surprising number managing to make it back on foot. One such was 6. *Staffel*'s Feldwebel Emil Stratmann, who fell victim to flak near Murmashi on 29 June. It took him six days to reach the German lines, where he is seen here on a makeshift stretcher being carried by four *Gebirgsjäger* wearing head netting as protection against the swarms of midsummer midges



A trio of enemy fighters sent down close to Murmansk on 17 June took Feldwebel Rudolf Müller's score to 47 and won him JG 5's first Knight's Cross. Generaloberst Hans-Jürgen Stumpff, the AOC of *Luftflotte* 5, is seen here presenting the award to Rudi Müller at Petsamo two days later

based 4./JG 5 was ordered north to take up residence at Banak.

2 June's two Stuka escort forays to Murmansk saw further kills added to the scoresheets of JG 5's '*alte Hasen*' ('Old hares', as the Luftwaffe called its more experienced pilots), with Feldwebel Rudi Müller claiming a brace of Hurricanes and Oberleutnant Horst Carganico getting one. Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler was credited with a P-40, while Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich's Hurricane took him into double figures. A spell of unseasonably bad weather then severely curtailed operations, and ten days were to pass before the *Geschwader* resumed its activities against Murmansk.

At least another eight Hurricanes and a single MiG-3 paid the price for JG 5's two visits to the port on 13 June, but a retaliatory raid on Petsamo that same evening cost the Soviets even more dearly. All six of the attacking Pe-2 bombers were reportedly brought down, with Oberleutnant Wulf-Dietrich Widowitz and Unteroffizier Walter Döring being credited with two apiece.

On 15 June a 'maximum effort' was mounted against Murmansk. In Arctic theatre terms this meant all of about 30 bombers (Ju 87s and Ju 88s) escorted by some 40 of JG 5's single- and twin-

engined fighters. The results of the bombing are not known, but the *Geschwader's* bag of enemy fighters was surprisingly modest, with only six or so claims being submitted. One of the *Zerstörer* pilots did not even realise that he had scored a kill. As far as Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Kurpiers was concerned, he had simply shot a P-39 Airacobra off another Bf 110's tail. It was only after landing back at Kirkenes that he was told by his fellow pilot that the Airacobra had in fact crashed, thereby giving Kurpiers his third victory.

A sprawling, untidy dogfight with a mixed force of some 40+ Soviet fighters over the Kola Inlet on 17 June was far more productive. A quarter of the enemy machines were claimed destroyed, with Feldwebel Rudi Müller again being well to the fore with a pair of Hurricanes and a single 'I-180'. These raised his overall score to 47 and resulted in his being nominated for the Knight's Cross. The award was presented to him by Generaloberst Hans-Jürgen Stumpff, the Air Officer Commanding *Luftflotte* 5, during the latter's visit to Petsamo two days later. Although Rudi Müller was the third member of 6./JG 5 to sport the Knight's Cross, he was the first pilot of JG 5 proper to receive this prestigious decoration. The two previous recipients, Hugo Dahmer and Horst Carganico, had both won their awards in the latter half of 1941 when the *Staffel* was still operating under its original designation as 1./JG 77.

In the last week of June two pilots of the *Zerstörerstaffel* achieved ace status by notching up their fifth kills. While flying a *freie Jagd* sweep southwest of Murmansk on 24 June Oberleutnant Max Franzisket made

it five by downing a Hurricane not far from the Soviet fighter airfield at Murmashi. It was Franzisket who had had the Airacobra sitting on his tail nine days earlier. And it was the NCO who had unknowingly shot it down, Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Kurpiers, who was to become the second of June's two *Zerstörer* aces. Having claimed a Hurricane in the interim, Kurpiers' fifth success was a Kittyhawk brought down on 28 June, also close to Murmashi.

Forty-eight hours after Kurpiers 'made ace' the *Zerstörerstaffel* underwent yet another change of designation. Up until this time the *Geschwader* had deployed two *Gruppen* (II. and III.) in the Arctic facing the Russians to the east, and one (I.) in Norway protecting that country's coastline against incursions by the RAF across the North Sea. But the threat from the west had now grown to such proportions that a single *Gruppe* was no longer sufficient to guard against it. In early July a fourth *Gruppe* was therefore formed. And it was to avoid the renewed risk of duplication and confusion (the new IV./JG 5 being made up of 10., 11. and 12. *Staffeln*) that 10.(Z)/JG 5 had been renumbered as 13.(Z)/JG 5 – the designation it would retain for the rest of its service in the Arctic.

July was to be very much a replay of June as far as the air war in the far north was concerned. At the beginning of the month the Luftwaffe's bombers focused their attentions on the next Allied convoy (perhaps the most famous, or infamous, of them all), while JG 5's fighters continued to divide their time and energies between operations against Murmansk – and, to a lesser degree, the Litsa front – and the defence of their own bases. Individual and unit scores rose steadily throughout the month. In contrast, losses were minimal, with only one known combat fatality.

The 35 merchantmen of PQ 17 that had sailed from Iceland on 27 June were first spotted by patrolling U-boats east of Jan Mayen Island shortly before noon on 1 July. Little more than two hours later the first Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft began circling the convoy. That same afternoon JG 5's fighters escorted a force of Ju 87 Stukas in an attack on Murmansk. The purpose of this raid was to inflict as much damage as possible to the town's docks prior to the arrival of the approaching convoy. The Luftwaffe planners were seemingly unaware of the fact that June's bombing had already 'reduced Murmansk to a standstill', and that all but eight of PQ 17's merchant vessels were therefore heading not for Murmansk, but for the smaller port of Archangel further to the east. As it transpired, fewer than a third of the merchantmen that had set out from Iceland were to make it.

The four previous PQ convoys had all run the gauntlet of enemy aircraft and U-boats, and had suffered as a result. But an additional danger threatened PQ 17 – at least in the minds of the Admiralty in London. Available intelligence had convinced Their Lordships that a powerful surface force of German capital ships, headed by the mighty 42,000-ton *Tirpitz*, was preparing to venture forth from their Norwegian fjord anchorages and attack the convoy. This prompted them to send a series of increasingly urgent and alarmist messages to PQ 17's escort commander, culminating at 2136 hrs on 4 July in the almost frantic 'Most Immediate. Convoy is to scatter'.

The tone of this last signal seemed to suggest that the 'enemy's mastheads might be appearing over the horizon at any moment'. In reality, nothing

of the kind happened. In the days that followed, German aircraft and U-boats picked off 20 of the remaining 31 merchant vessels that had obeyed the order to scatter and were now doggedly heading, either singly or in small groups, towards the coast of northern Russia (for further details see *Osprey Combat Aircraft 79 – Junkers Ju 88 Kampfgeschwader on the Russian Front* and *Osprey Combat Aircraft 100 – Heinkel He 111 Kampfgeschwader on the Russian Front*).

The tragedy of PQ 17's final days was played out far beyond the range of JG 5's fighters. For them it was business as usual much nearer to home. Their almost daily clashes with the enemy meant that individual scores, particularly those of the established aces, continued to climb. During the Stuka escort mission to Murmansk on the afternoon of 1 July Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler had claimed yet another Hurricane. Twenty-four hours later Feldwebel Helmut Kischnick was credited with bringing down two Ilyushin bombers engaged in a retaliatory raid on Banak. And so it went on. A dogfight west of the Kola Inlet on 7 July saw further successes. Among those making multiple claims on this occasion were Unteroffizier Werner Schumacher (two I-16s and a MiG-3) and Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler (a Hurricane and a Kittyhawk). The next day Ehrler got another Hurricane, as too did his *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Hans-Dieter Hartwein, while Unteroffizier Walter Schuck's P-40 took his growing tally to eight.

Although there were a number of emergency scrambles at Petsamo throughout the course of 11 July, the only recorded kills were a pair of Pe-2s, both claimed by 7. *Staffel's* Unteroffizier August Braun shortly before 1400 hrs. Of far more significance in the wider scheme of things was the fact that 11 July was also the day on which the first four surviving merchantmen of PQ 17 finally put into Archangel.

Forty-eight hours later JG 5's Arctic *Gruppen* suffered its sole combat fatality of the month when Leutnant Hans-Joachim Bahr of 8. *Staffel* – an ace with at least seven Arctic victories under his belt – was brought down by Soviet flak west of Murmansk. Bahr's lifeless body was later found in the wreckage of his *Emil* by Russian troops. On that same day 6./JG 5 tangled with a force of some 20 enemy fighters over the Kola Inlet. Feldwebel Leopold Knier claimed the destruction of an Airacobra, although one source suggests that Knier's victim was, in fact, one of the first of the new Yakovlev Yak-1s to be encountered in the far north. If correct, it would appear that German intelligence had not picked up on the arrival in-theatre of the new regiment of Yak fighters or, if it had, that the news had not yet filtered down to the pilots of JG 5, for early the following afternoon (14 July) Hauptmann Günther Scholz, the *Kommandeur* of III. *Gruppe*, made a similar mistake. He too shot down a Yak-1 near Murmansk that he misidentified as a Hurricane.

Two maximum efforts against targets in and around Murmansk on 19 July resulted in at least ten enemy aircraft being destroyed (including a third Yak-1, this one being incorrectly described by claimant Oberleutnant Hans-Dieter Hartwein as a Kittyhawk!). But the day ended with two pilots missing, both having bailed out behind enemy lines – 6. *Staffel's* Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich to the southwest of Murmansk and Oberfeldwebel Leopold Knier close to the mouth of the Kola Inlet. Both would make it back to their units a week later, each with a very different story to tell.

After coming down not far from the Soviet fighter field at Murmashi, Hans Döbrich immediately struck out southwestwards into the near featureless tundra. Avoiding Russian patrols, he slipped between the enemy outposts along the Litsa front and reached friendly territory after a gruelling and circuitous 125-kilometre, seven-day trek. After returning to his *Staffel*, Döbrich would go on to add a further 46 victories to the 19 he had already achieved.

In contrast, Oberfeldwebel Knier, who had been shot down by a Kittyhawk close to the settlement of Sayda Guba on the western shore of the Kola Inlet, was quickly rounded up by Russian troops. He was to spend a mere three days in Soviet captivity, however. Like Oberfeldwebel Willi Pfränger before him, Knier was given a stark choice – spend the rest of his days in a PoW camp or work for the Russians. Not surprisingly, he too opted for the latter alternative but, unlike Pfränger, he was not given a lengthy course in espionage. His brief was direct and to the point. He would be dropped by parachute close to the frontlines, make his way back to his unit on foot and, at the earliest possible opportunity, fly one of JG 5's new Bf 109Fs back to the Russians!

In retrospect, it seems incredible that the Soviets could actually believe that a captured German pilot would honour such an undertaking. Knier certainly had no intention of so doing, but things did not go quite according to plan. The Russian aircraft taking him to the front came under attack and he was forced to bail out well short of his intended dropping point. He had to march for hours before reaching German-held territory, finally arriving back at his unit on 27 July, just one day after Hans Döbrich. Needless to say, Knier lost no time in reporting what had occurred during his brief period of captivity. And again, as in the case of Willi Pfränger, he could not risk falling into the hands of the Russians a second time. Knier was therefore posted to I. *Gruppe* currently deployed in southern Norway. It is not known exactly how many kills, if any, Oberfeldwebel Knier subsequently scored against the western allies, one source putting his overall total at eight. But it seems reasonably certain that the 'Airacobra' (aka Yak-1) he had downed on 13 July was his sixth, and final, Arctic victory.

Although the northern tundra may not have been ideal terrain from a navigational point of view, and the environment was undeniably harsh and inhospitable, it did have one great advantage for any downed flyer. Its very remoteness, barren emptiness and lack of habitation made evasion that much easier when trying to cross enemy territory. And even while Döbrich and Knier were still officially listed as missing, yet a third pilot was proving that very point.

On the evening of 22 July Hauptmann Horst Carganico, the *Kommandeur* of II. *Gruppe*, had suffered engine failure and been forced to make an emergency landing behind Russian lines not far from the coast. When he failed to return to base, aircraft were sent out to search for him, but without success. In fact, Hauptmann Carganico was already making his way back on foot. After three days in the wilderness he reached Petsamo 'tired and hungry, but little the worse for wear'.

On that same 25 July six more merchantmen of PQ 17 – having sheltered for several days in Matochkin Strait, a deep inlet on the west coast of Novaya Zemlya – finally arrived in Archangel. And three days

On 19 July, Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich of 6./JG 5 was forced to bail out close to Murmashi. He would take seven days to get back to Petsamo. Here Döbrich (on the left) is seen with Stratmann perched on the wing of Döbrich's replacement 'Yellow 10'. They clearly have a lot to talk about, and judging by the number of bottles in evidence it is going to be a long session!



after that the last survivor of all from the ill-fated convoy, an American vessel that had had to be salvaged after being run aground on a sandbank, limped into the White Sea port of Molotovsk.

In terms of fighting strength the Arctic theatre was something of a 'poor relation' for the Russians too. In the air they had been, and still were, heavily reliant on Western aid. The preponderance of Hurricanes, Kittyhawks and Airacobras on JG 5's scoreboard was eloquent testimony to this. But, for the Soviets, things were gradually beginning to change. July had seen the advent of the first Yak-1s, and August was to bring an even more ominous portent of things to come – the heavily armed and armoured Ilyushin Il-2 *Shturmovik* ground-assault aircraft.

A small detachment of 4./JG 5 based at Pontsalenjoki, a landing strip some 40 kilometres to the southwest of Kiestinki, was the first to feel the effects of this latest addition to the Soviet armoury when a formation of *Shturmoviki* carried out a surprise low-level attack early on the morning of 4 August. Fortunately, casualties and material damage were light on this occasion, but the ground fighting had flared up again along this sector of the front astride the Arctic Circle. In an effort to provide additional air support for the troops in the region Oberstleutnant Gotthard Handrick was ordered to take 16 Bf 109s (from his *Geschwaderstab* and 7. *Staffel*) down to Pontsalenjoki the following day.

The airfield they were to fly from – little more than a 'pocket handkerchief-sized clearing' in the vast Karelian forest – was close to the frontline and under constant enemy observation. In an attempt to hide their arrival from prying Russian eyes, the Bf 109s made the transfer in four separate *Schwärmen* at hourly intervals. They were scheduled to make a refuelling stop at Rovaniemi before embarking on the final 200-kilometre leg to Pontsalenjoki. And as the latter was not easy to find, the leader of each *Schwarm* had been expressly instructed to obtain details of its exact location from Rovaniemi flying control prior to takeoff.

Obergefreiter Kurt Scharmacher, who was part of the first *Schwarm* to leave Petsamo, lost a wheel after landing at Rovaniemi, which meant that he was unable to continue the flight. For Scharmacher, this minor mishap was

to prove a blessing in disguise, as his *Schwarmführer*, Leutnant Bodo Helms, failed to find Ponsalenjoki and put down on a deserted Russian forward landing ground instead. He and the other two members of his *Schwarm* were quickly rounded up by troops of the Red Army. The communist propaganda machine had a field day, trumpeting the news that three fighter aces of the Fascist Luftwaffe had defected to the Russian side! Ignoring the fact that the trio's 'defection' was inadvertent, the Soviets were at least partially right – one of their captives was indeed an ace. Unteroffizier Werner Schumacher was at that time 7. *Staffel*'s highest scorer with a total of 30 victories to his credit. Schumacher, who had been wounded by flak before belly-landing close to Helms, was to succumb to his injuries in a Soviet PoW camp five months later.

Meanwhile, up in Petsamo, the mood was much more buoyant. 5 August's missions to the Murmansk area had resulted in the usual clutch of kills, among them a brace of Hurricanes for 6. *Staffel*'s Feldwebel Rudi Müller, the first of which had given him his half-century. And so it would continue for the remainder of the month, with JG 5 taking a regular toll of the enemy. On the debit side, however, at least four machines (including a Bf 110) came down in Russian territory. Two of the pilots were killed, but the others were able to get back to the German lines.

As was to be expected, the well-known names were still dominating the scoreboards. On 7 August Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich took his total to 21 by downing a pair of P-40s near Murmansk. And three days later Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels was credited with three of the nine Hurricanes claimed by 8. *Staffel* in a 20-minute low-level dogfight east of the Litsa.

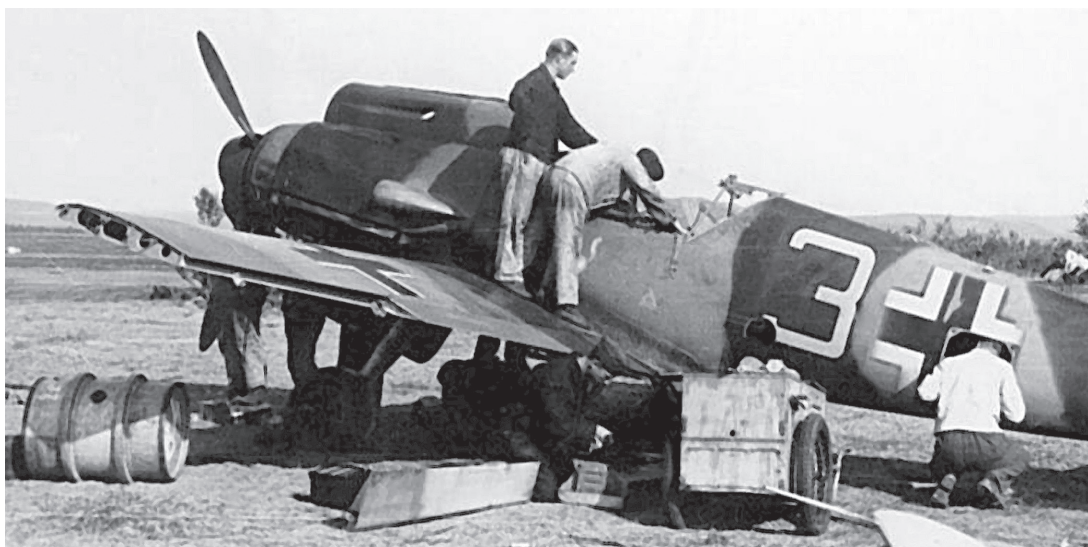
Occasionally, however, even the most successful of *Experten* came off second best. On the afternoon of 12 August Hauptmann Horst



Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler poses with his victory stick in hand in front of his Bf 109F 'Yellow 12' at Petsamo in July 1942 – the month before he was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 5. Wearing II. *Gruppe*'s trademark camouflage scheme (which was not a standard factory finish, but one that was reportedly applied at a Luftwaffe depot prior to final delivery, hence the slight variations in the patterning), this *Friedrich* is distinguished by its pilot's newly adopted 'lucky' number 12 (via Eddie Nielinger)



Feldwebel Rudi Müller watches with interest as the 50th victory bar is added to the rudder of his 'Yellow 3' on 5 August 1942



Sixteen days later, on 21 August, the same 'Yellow 3' was damaged in a dogfight near Murmashi and Rudi Müller was slightly wounded in the face and arm by glass splinters from the shattered canopy. Back at Petsamo the groundcrew and mechanics immediately set to work to get the machine serviceable again

Carganico, the *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 5, was leading a small formation of 6. *Staffel* machines on a *freie Jagd* sweep over Motovskiy Bay when they bumped into a superior force of Soviet Hurricanes and Airacobras. In a 'confused and scrappy engagement', 6./JG 5's *Staffelkapitän*, Oberleutnant Hans-Dieter Hartwein, managed to bring down one of the Hurricanes, but Carganico's Bf 109 took multiple hits from an unseen assailant curving in on his tail. With his radiator damaged and engine rapidly overheating, Carganico stood no chance of making it back to Petsamo.

For the second time in exactly three weeks he had to belly-land behind enemy lines. Carganico's failure to return to base sparked another massive search operation, with aircraft from all *Staffeln*, including the Bf 110s of 13.(Z)/JG 5, being sent out in relays throughout the rest of the day to try and find II. *Gruppe*'s missing *Kommandeur*, but without result. Carganico had, in fact, come down much closer to the front than on the previous occasion and was to reach a German outpost the very next day.

After arriving back in Petsamo Carganico decided to commemorate his two lucky escapes by amending the personal 'Micky-Maus' emblem that had adorned each of his Bf 109Fs. Hitherto sported in miniature form on the engine cowling, he now had it repainted much larger on the side of the fuselage just aft of the cockpit in place of the regulation *Gruppenkommandeur*'s chevrons. As an additional refinement 'Micky' was depicted dragging a pair of shoes, and the dates of Carganico's two treks back across hostile territory were also recorded (for photographs see Osprey *Aircraft of the Aces 37 – Bf 109 Aces of the Russian Front*, page 50).

On the day of Carganico's return, 13 August, the pilots of JG 5 racked up a total of 15 enemy aircraft destroyed, the majority of them during an escort mission to Varlamovo, a Soviet airfield to the east of Murmansk. Feldwebel Rudi Müller was again to the fore with three victories, while Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels got two during a subsequent *freie Jagd* sweep.

The *Zerstörerstaffel*, which was also involved in escorting the Ju 88s to Varlamovo, fared less well. The unit's nine Bf 110s became embroiled in

a vicious dogfight with P-40s not far from Murmansk. One of the *Zerstörer* was carrying a war correspondent who had gone along on the mission to record his experiences. And it was this machine that was hit in the port engine. Many pilots were reluctant to take war correspondents along on operations, regarding them as unlucky – and with some justification, it would seem! With the left engine ablaze and the other pouring glycol, the rear gunner and war correspondent lost no time in taking to their parachutes. Both managed to get back to German lines. The former reported seeing the pilot jettison his canopy, but for some reason Leutnant Hans-Bodo van Rabenau was unable to bail out and went down with 'LN+MR'.

Eight days later, on 21 August, the Bf 110s of 13.(Z)/JG 5 were again heading for a Russian airfield in the vicinity of Murmansk. This time, however, it was *they* who were carrying the bombs. They even had their own fighter escort in the shape of eight Bf 109s of 6. *Staffel*. As the German force retired from the target area it was set upon by some 36 Soviet fighters. 6. *Staffel* immediately turned to engage the enemy, enabling the Bf 110s to escape unscathed. In the fight that followed 6./JG 5's pilots were credited with no fewer than 14 victories, with Rudi Müller and Hans Döbrich accounting for two apiece. But the *Staffel* lost two of its own, Feldwebel Albert Brunner being forced to bail out of his ailing *Friedrich* while still over enemy territory. He had to complete the rest of the journey on foot, getting back to Petsamo the next day.

Staffelkapitän Hans-Dieter Hartwein was not so fortunate. Rather than abandon his 'Yellow 6' he chose to attempt an emergency landing east of the Litsa, only to come to grief on the rocky tundra. The Bf 109 smashed into a large boulder and burst into flames. The enemy fighter he had shot down only minutes earlier was Hartwein's 12th, and final, Arctic kill.

The new month was to see new names added to JG 5's growing list of aces, and the appearance of new aircraft types in the Arctic arena. The three missions flown on 2 September resulted in 25 enemy aircraft destroyed. In addition to the usual claimants (Müller, Döbrich, Bartels *et al*) there were several less familiar names – Unteroffizier Helmut Klante of 7. *Staffel*, for one. The P-40 he brought down near Petsamo at 0742 hrs was not only the first Soviet victim of the day, it also took his own personal score to five, thereby making him the first new ace of the month.

2 September was also the day on which the 40 merchantmen of PQ 18 – the last of the famous 'PQ' series of Arctic convoys – sailed from Loch Ewe, in western Scotland, its destination being Archangel. Mindful of the fate that had befallen PQ 17, and still concerned about the threat posed by *Tirpitz* and other enemy capital ships at anchor in their Norwegian fjord lairs, the British planners were this time taking the added precaution of sending two squadrons of Coastal Command Hampden torpedo-bombers to northern Russia. It was hoped that these aircraft would safeguard the convoy against any attack by heavy surface ships of the *Kriegsmarine*.



The best known evader of all was undoubtedly Hauptmann Horst Carganico, the *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 5, whose two treks back across enemy territory in July and August 1942 were commemorated by some very fancy artwork on his later aircraft. Here, he is returning to Petsamo on 25 July after his first successful evasion, minus his boots but otherwise 'little the worse for wear'

The Hampdens, 32 strong, took off from Sumburgh, in the Shetlands, when the convoy was just three days out. Their destination was Vaenga, on the Kola Inlet – the field that had been home to No 151 Wing's Hurricanes the previous year. In order to avoid the Luftwaffe hornets' nest of Bf 109s at Petsamo, the bombers were ordered to fly a more circuitous southerly route staging via Afrikanda, one of the Soviet airfields along the Murmansk–Moscow railway. This decision probably did more harm than good, as the transfer flight proved something of a disaster. More than a quarter of the Hampdens were lost, with four being shot down (one in error by Russian fighters), four crashing and one being forced to land on a German airfield when it ran short of fuel.

Meanwhile, the day's aerial activity in the Murmansk area on that same 5 September had netted JG 5's pilots at least seven victories, including three for Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels and two for Feldwebel Albert Brunner. But again Brunner failed to return. He had obviously been trying to add a third to his day's tally, for when last seen he was locked in a dogfight with a Soviet machine near Varlamovo. His non-arrival back at base sent off another intensive search operation. It failed to find any trace of him.

A string of escort missions and *freie Jagd* sweeps on 8 September resulted in nine more victories for the Bf 109s of JG 5 – and one for the *Zerstörerstaffel*. The Yak-1 that Oberfeldwebel Theodor Weissenberger of 13.(Z)/JG 5 brought down over Lake Nyal in the middle of the afternoon was his 23rd, and final, kill with the Bf 110.

With 13. *Staffel* being employed more and more in the fighter-bomber role, Weissenberger had applied for a transfer to single-engined fighters, and later that same day he had gone to Petsamo for a 30-minute trial flight in a Bf 109. This was all it took to convince his superiors that Weissenberger was a 'natural'. He was welcomed into II./JG 5 with open arms by *Gruppenkommandeur* Hauptmann Horst Carganico, who assigned him to Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler's 6. *Staffel*. The 'Sixth' was indisputably the 'ace' *Staffel* of the entire *Geschwader*, and it was perhaps no coincidence that in Ehrler and Weissenberger 6./JG 5 produced two of the highest-ranking Arctic *Experten* of them all.

Even though convoy PQ 18 was still some four days away, there was already increasing air activity on both sides. Luftwaffe reconnaissance confirmed a build-up of enemy strength on the airfields around Murmansk (and detected the presence of several of the Hampdens in the process). Rightly expecting imminent Soviet bombing attacks, the Germans struck first, mounting a raid by Ju 88s on the Varlamovo complex to the northeast of Murmansk on 9 September. Supporting operations by the Bf 109s of JG 5 brought claims for close on 20 enemy aircraft destroyed, with 6. *Staffel* alone being responsible for more than half of them. In a vicious 15-minute dogfight with 30 Hurricanes over the Kola Inlet, 6./JG 5's pilots downed 11 of their opponents. Feldwebel Rudi Müller led the field with four (taking his total to 70 overall), while *Staffelkapitän* Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler and Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich were credited with two each.

These victories were not the only cause for celebrations. Four days after being posted missing, Feldwebel Albert Brunner arrived back at Petsamo to a rapturous welcome.

JG 5 would play its usual ancillary role in the coming battle for PQ 18 by defending the Luftwaffe's bomber bases. As part of the final preparations several minor redeployments were made. The most noteworthy of these was perhaps the transfer of six Fw 190s of IV./JG 5 from the west coast of Norway up to Banak, where they took over airfield defence duties from the small detachment of 5./JG 5 that had previously been stationed there. It is believed that these 11. *Staffel* machines were the first examples of the Focke-Wulf fighter to be deployed against the Soviets in the far north.

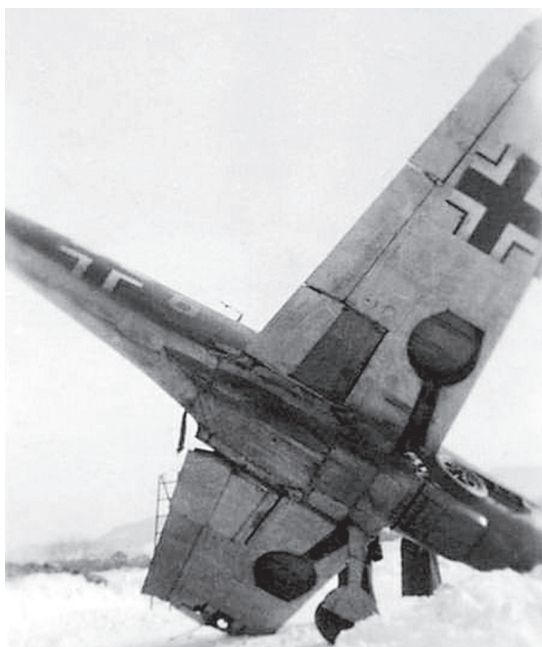
The expected Soviet bombing raids commenced on 11 September, with the first of them being directed not at Banak but against JG 5's own base at Petsamo. The attackers paid a high price for their temerity. The *Geschwader's* Bf 109s pursued one group of Pe-2s back across the Litsa and shot down six of them, three being claimed by 8. *Staffel's* Feldwebel Heinz Beyer in the space of just 12 minutes. A fellow Feldwebel of 8./JG 5, Heinrich Bartels, had also been credited with three kills on 11 September before then going on to add a further trio the next day. These took his lengthening list of victories to 35.

The following 48 hours provided something of a breather for the pilots of JG 5 as the action switched far out to sea. The battle for PQ 18 was the most intense and hard fought of all, the convoy losing a third of its merchant vessels with three being sunk by U-boats and ten by torpedo-bombers. But the Luftwaffe also received a severe mauling, with close on 40 He 111s and Ju 88s of KG 26 alone reportedly being brought down by the convoy's defences.

This was the finale of the Luftwaffe's long-running campaign against the Arctic convoys. Events in the Mediterranean were soon to denude the far north of almost its entire bomber and torpedo-bomber strength. And although another 20 convoys were to brave the hazardous voyage from Scotland to northern Russia before the end of the war in Europe, not one merchant vessel would be lost to enemy air attack *en route* (in fact only five merchantmen in all were sunk between December 1942 and April 1945, every one of them the victim of a U-boat).

The Luftwaffe's virtual abandonment of its anti-convoy operations robbed the Arctic front of much of its strategic significance. JG 5's Bf 109s would continue to escort Stuka and bomber raids on the Murmansk–Moscow railway and other targets in the region. They would also help defend their own airfields against enemy air attack, but, for the most part, the far northern theatre became even more of an isolated backwater. In contrast to the fluid war of movement on the other sectors of the eastern front – the sweeping armoured advances, the encirclements and the headlong retreats – the Arctic region alone remained static. On the ground the opposing forces still occupied trenches and bunkers strongly reminiscent of World War 1 Flanders. In the air the Luftwaffe and Soviet air forces operated out of established bases, each trying to gain and maintain mastery of the airspace separating the two sides.

It was thus very much a fighter-versus-fighter conflict at this stage, as was evidenced by JG 5's collective and individual scoreboards that were made up overwhelmingly of enemy single-engined fighters. Such circumstances greatly favoured the *Geschwader's* leading *Experten*, who were able to take a regular and ever increasing toll of their opponents.



The deteriorating weather in the late autumn of 1942 inevitably led to a string of minor accidents, although exactly where, when and how 9. *Staffel*'s 'Yellow 6' came to end up on its nose with half its port wing missing is not known

In the early afternoon of 15 September, for example, a dogfight with some 30+ Soviet fighters to the southwest of Murmansk resulted in nearly half of the enemy machines being shot down. The ever aggressive Feldwebel Rudi Müller claimed four, while Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich and Leutnant Theo Weissenberger accounted for a pair apiece. The two P-40s brought down in as many minutes by *ex-Zerstörer* pilot Theo Weissenberger were his first victories with the Bf 109. They took his overall score to 25 and set him firmly on the long road to his double century.

The dogfight near the Soviet airfield at Murmashi may have launched Weissenberger's career as a fighter pilot, but it brought to an end that of 6./JG 5's veteran Unteroffizier Ludwig Scharf. An experienced NCO pilot of the type that formed the solid core of every successful unit, Scharf was highly regarded as a dependable '*Kaczmarek*', or wingman. He flew as No 2 to many of 6. *Staffel*'s leading aces, protecting their tails while they racked up their impressive scores. It had thus taken Scharf more than a year to achieve his

own respectable (albeit unconfirmed) 18 victories.

But an attempt to claim number 19 was to prove Unteroffizier Scharf's undoing. His fighter was hit while carrying out a head-on attack on a Soviet P-40, the Messerschmitt rearing up briefly before falling away and going down in a near vertical dive. It exploded into a fireball on impact with the ground. As no parachute had been seen Unteroffizier Ludwig Scharf was presumed killed. In reality, he had managed to escape from his doomed 'Yellow 4', only to spend many years in Soviet captivity.

Another mission to the Murmashi area on 19 September brought further successes, among them a brace of Hurricanes each for Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler and Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich. Ehrler's pair raised his overall total to 60.

Two days prior to this the 27 remaining merchantmen of convoy PQ 18 had put in to Archangel. And it may have been in response to their arrival that the Bf 110s of 13. *Staffel* were transferred down from Kirkenes to Alakurtti on 20 September. But if the intention was for the *Zerstörer* to disrupt the onward flow of supplies by rail from the White Sea port, they were given precious little time to carry out their task. For after flying only three missions against the Murmansk–Moscow railway line, 13.(Z)/JG 5 was ordered to return to Kirkenes just 24 hours later. The *Staffel*'s brief stay at Alakurtti had, however, enabled Unteroffizier Reinhold Fiedler to take his score into double figures by bringing down an over-inquisitive MiG-3.

A number of bomber escort and *freie Jagd* operations were flown against targets in the Murmansk region on 22 September. Among the pilots contributing multiple kills to the day's total of 17 enemy fighters destroyed were Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels with four Hurricanes and a pair of MiG-3s and Leutnant Theo Weissenberger with a brace of Hurricanes and a single Kittyhawk.

The last major clashes of the month took place five days later on 27 September, when a hectic succession of escort, *freie Jagd* and *Jabo* missions ended with an impressive 26 kills being claimed. Nearly a quarter of that number (five P-40s and a single P-39) was credited to 6. *Staffel's* Feldwebel Rudi Müller alone, taking his overall total to 81 and underlining his current position as the Arctic's leading ace. Other successes included four Hurricanes and an Airacobra for Leutnant Theo Weissenberger, his sixth to tenth victories with the Bf 109. Weissenberger's wingman, Unteroffizier August Mors, also got a Hurricane, which proved to be the first of the 58 confirmed kills that would win him a posthumous Knight's Cross after his death in France in August 1944.

But the most noteworthy victory of that 27 September was undoubtedly the RAF Spitfire brought down by the little known Gefreiter Kurt Dobner of the Fw 190-equipped 11. *Staffel*. The British photo-reconnaissance machine had been sent to Murmansk to obtain imagery of the German battleship *Tirpitz* at anchor in Altenfjord, but it had been caught by Dobner north of 11./JG 5's Banak base shortly before midday (whether on its way to or returning from Altenfjord is not known).

October witnessed a sudden deterioration in weather conditions and operations were, as a consequence, severely curtailed for much of the month. It was not until 21 October that Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels downed a pair of MiG-3s (claimed as I-61s) during a *freie Jagd* sweep in the Murmansk area. Just over a week later, on 29 October, Bartels got another trio of MiG-3s (this time initially identified as LaGG-3s) in the same region, thereby upping his total to 45. The following day it was ex-*Zerstörer* pilot Leutnant Theo Weissenberger who headed the scoring stakes with four P-40 Kittyhawks and a single LaGG-3 shot down during the course of two separate missions. These gave Weissenberger 15 Bf 109 victories to add to the 23 he had previously achieved with the Bf 110.

In early November the ever worsening winter weather and declining number of daylight hours – fewer than six a day at this time of year – led to II./JG 5 being transferred down to Rovaniemi and Alakurtti where, together with the *Zerstörer* of 13. *Staffel*, they were employed in train-busting missions along the White Sea stretch of the Murmansk–Moscow railway. III./JG 5 remained in the far north, the bulk of the *Gruppe* wintering at Petsamo, with small detachments at both Kirkenes and Nautsi.

The adverse conditions towards the end of the year meant that the number of missions flown was greatly reduced, as too were the opportunities for victories. The multiple kills of only a few weeks earlier were no longer possible. Even the leading aces found it difficult to add to their scores by more than a single kill at a time. During a *freie Jagd* sweep of the Murmansk region on 5 November, for example, Feldwebel Heinrich Bartels and Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich each managed to claim just one enemy fighter – a LaGG-3 and a Kittyhawk, respectively. And exactly one week later, while escorting a formation of Ju 88s in an attack on enemy shipping in the Kola Inlet, Unteroffizier Walter Schuck also brought down a Kittyhawk.

There was cause for double celebrations on 13 November 1942 when two members of JG 5 were awarded Knight's Crosses. The first went to Feldwebel Heinrich Bartels of 8. *Staffel* for an 'official' total of 45 enemy aircraft destroyed, although by the time of the actual presentation – by Oberst Alexander Holle, *Fliegerführer Nord (Ost)*, seen left – he had already added number 46 . . .





... and the second was won by Leutnant Theo Weissenberger of 6./JG 5 for his 38 (the first 23 of which had been claimed while serving with the *Zerstörerstaffel*). He is seen here on the left with the *Expertenstaffel*'s two earlier Knight's Cross recipients, Heinrich Ehrler (centre) and Rudi Müller

Schuck's score now stood at 13, but he was a long way behind Feldwebel Heinrich Bartels and Leutnant Theo Weissenberger, who were both awarded the Knight's Cross on 13 November – Bartels for his then total of 45 enemy aircraft destroyed and Weissenberger for 38.

For the remainder of the month and much of December air activity was minimal, with only the occasional operation, weather permitting, and meeting with the enemy. In fact, it was not until the very last week of the year that Feldwebel Walter Schuck was able to add anything to his still modest score. While escorting Ju 87s to Murmansk on 26 December Schuck claimed a LaGG-3 over the target area – his first success in more than six weeks. During the return flight, however, the Bf 109 flown by 11-victory ace Feldwebel Josef Kaiser was hit by Russian flak. He was forced to bail out just short of the frontlines and fell into the hands of Soviet troops.

Like Oberfeldwebel Willi Pfränger and others before him, 'Sepp' Kaiser allowed himself to be 'persuaded' to spy for the Russians. After some cursory training in wireless procedures, he was dropped by parachute (from the bomb-bay of a Pe-2!) over German-held territory. His orders were to send back reports on Luftwaffe air movements, but he lost no time in surrendering himself to the authorities and was soon returned to non-operational flying duties. Kaiser was eventually posted to JG 2 '*Richthofen*' in the west in the autumn of 1943.

On 27 December, 24 hours after despatching the LaGG-3 over Murmansk, Feldwebel Walter Schuck claimed a Kittyhawk during a *freie Jagd* sweep of the same region. He then rounded off the year by bringing down a trio of enemy machines on 31 December. It was, as he himself



Despite the adverse conditions and minimal amount of daylight, successes were still being achieved as 1942 drew to a close. On the last day of the year rising star Feldwebel Walter Schuck of 9./JG 5 scored a trio of kills to take his total to 15

noted, 'The first time that I had achieved three victories in a single day'. The first two were a pair of Pe-2s, part of a small mixed force of Pe-2 and DB-3 bombers reported to be heading towards Petsamo. Among those scrambled just before 0900 hrs in response to the threat was Feldwebel Walter Schuck;

'We took off into the darkness. Lines of tracer from our flak emplacements close to the Litsa front showed us the way to the Russian bombers. The moment they spotted us they tried to get away at low level – but too late. My very first burst of fire hammered into one of the fleeing Pe-2s, which hit the ground like a stone from a height of only 50 metres. I then set off in pursuit of his colleague. After a four-minute chase at ground level I achieved hits in the second Pe-2's starboard engine. The flames quickly engulfed the entire wing and he too smashed into the ground.'

Less than 90 minutes later the Bf 109s of III./JG 5 were back in the air, this time escorting Ju 87 Stukas and Ju 88s in a raid on Soviet artillery positions around Murmansk. Walter Schuck continues;

'We split up into individual *Schwärmen* as before, with my *Schwarm* protecting a group of three Ju 87s, and climbed to 3000 metres. About halfway between the frontline and Murmansk a whole crowd of Airacobras and Kittyhawks suddenly appeared out of nowhere. More and more Russian fighters joined them and a fierce dogfight broke out. I latched onto a Kittyhawk that was sitting on the tail of one of the Stukas and sent it down in flames.'

Three other pilots also claimed a Kittyhawk each during the 'fierce' 20-minute dogfight high above the frozen tundra, among them future centurion Oberfeldwebel Franz Dörr, while the sole P-39 Airacobra brought down was a first for Leutnant Friedrich Schumann. Against these five successes the *Gruppe* suffered the loss of one of its own when Unteroffizier Dietrich Gathmann was seen to bail out behind enemy lines after his machine was badly damaged by Russian flak. This kill ratio of five-to-one was perhaps not overly impressive by current eastern front standards. However, it does serve to show that the Luftwaffe's fighters were still more than holding their own against an enemy who was slowly but surely growing in numbers and in operational expertise. The question now was what would the new year bring?



CHAPTER THREE

1943 – IN THE BALANCE

Ground personnel manoeuvre Feldwebel Hans Döbrich's 'Yellow 10' back onto its corduroy hardstanding at Alakurtti

Predictably enough, 1943 began very much as 1942 had ended, with the harsh midwinter weather dictating the scale and scope of operations. The severe conditions were also a contributing factor to the spate of losses suffered during the course of January. The *Zerstörerstaffel* was particularly hard hit, with eight of its Bf 110s being damaged or destroyed.

Despite the reduced number of missions flown, claims were still being made. On 9 January, Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler accounted for a brace of LaGG-3s and a Hurricane close to the Murmansk–Moscow railway line, while up at Petsamo the following day Feldwebel Walter Schuck got a Pe-2 and a Kittyhawk.

Although little was happening operationally, the early weeks of 1943 did see several changes within the *Geschwader*. One was II. *Gruppe*'s piecemeal conversion from its Bf 109Fs onto the newer Bf 109G, or *Gustav*, a programme that was also responsible for several of January's losses. In addition, it was decided that JG 5 should establish a dedicated *Jabostaffel* (fighter-bomber squadron) of its own. Several of the *Geschwader's Staffeln* had flown *Jabo* missions with Bf 109E/Fs in the past, but the Banak-based 11./JG 5, recently re-equipped with Fw 190s, was now selected to form the nucleus of the Arctic's 'official' fighter-bomber unit, which was given the designation of 14.(*Jabo*)/JG 5.

The man initially chosen to head the new *Staffel* was Hauptmann Erich Schreiber, but he was soon replaced by the highly experienced Hauptmann Friedrich-Wilhelm Strakeljahn, a Battle of Britain ace who had emerged from that conflict as the *Staffelkapitän* of 2.(J)/LG 2 with five kills to his credit.

But 'Straks' Strakeljahn would find few opportunities to add to his personal tally of aerial victories in the months to come, for 14. *Staffel*'s role was predominantly one of bombing. Its Fw 190s frequently operated in conjunction with the Bf 110s of 13.(Z)/JG 5, with fighter protection for both being provided by the Bf 109s of III. *Gruppe*.

As well as attacking enemy targets on land, 14.(*Jabo*)/JG 5 waged an almost private war against Soviet coastal shipping, sinking a number of the enemy's naval and merchant vessels. It also continued the campaign against the western allies' Arctic convoys, although perforce on a very much reduced scale. Unable to attack the convoys far out to sea as the now departed Heinkels and Junkers of KGs 26 and 30 had once done, Hauptmann Strakeljahn's Fw 190s had to resort to bombing the ships following their arrival in Murmansk.

After ten days of severe storms in the middle of the month, a marginal improvement in the weather allowed operations to resume in the last week of January. Feldwebel Walter Schuck lost little time in claiming his next two victories – the first in a fortnight – by downing a pair of P-40s during an escort mission to Murmansk on the morning of 24 January. Better weather in the south the following day had a far less happy outcome for 6. *Staffel*'s Leutnant Friedrich Lüdecke, however. The six-victory ace was brought down during a low-level attack on one of the Soviet fighter airfields lining the Murmansk–Moscow railway line and was fated to spend many years in Russian captivity.

Exactly two weeks after the loss of Leutnant Lüdecke, 6./JG 5's leading *Experte*, Oberfeldwebel Rudi Müller, had a lucky escape. On 8 February, after having claimed two kills (Nos 82 and 83) earlier in the day, he was injured in a landing accident. Fortunately, he escaped with mild concussion and after a brief spell in hospital was soon back in action, bagging No 84 – reportedly a Hurricane – on 17 February.

The sector along the Murmansk–Moscow railway line continued to see most of what little action there was over the next few days, although it was in the far north that two future aces were to claim their first kills. 7. *Staffel*'s Unteroffizier Arthur Beth was credited with a Hurricane brought down during a *Jabo* escort mission over the Kola Inlet on 25 February. Twenty-four hours later Unteroffizier August Lübking opened his scoresheet with a double – a brace of MBR-2 single-engined flying boats shot down into the sea at low level off the northeastern tip of the Rybachiy Peninsula.



The new year brought new machines as II./JG 5 began to exchange its *Friedrichs* for the more powerful *Gustav*. This particular G-2/R1 'gunboat' has clearly got some hours in already – note the leaks around the oil cooler intake and the heavy exhaust staining. Incidentally, the 'four-leaf clover' badge on the cowl, originally introduced by 6. *Staffel*, was now being used to indicate II. *Gruppe*. This happens to be a machine from 6./JG 5, however, as evidenced by the new, albeit short-lived, *Staffel* badge just visible beneath the cockpit. This rather complicated device consisted of 'Micky-Maus' (courtesy of Horst Carganico?) standing on a four-leaf clover while wrenching the tail off an I-16 *Rata*



'Straks' Strakeljahn, the *Kapitän* of 14. (*Jabo*)/JG 5, seems to be laying down the law to the groundcrew responsible for servicing his 'Black 5'

A ski-equipped Fieseler Storch, saviour of many a pilot brought down behind enemy lines



It was during this latter mission of 26 February that the *Kapitän* of 9. *Staffel*, Oberleutnant Wulf-Dietrich Widowitz, claimed a pair of P-40s, while Feldwebel Walter Schuck downed a lone Pe-2 off the mouth of the Kola Inlet. The same duo then ended the month with a Kittyhawk apiece, part of a small group of enemy fighter-bombers attacking Petsamo.

The following day (1 March) III./JG 5's base came under attack again, this time by heavily armed and armoured Il-2s, one of which was hacked down by Feldwebel Jakob 'Jockl' Norz from a height of only 100 metres. The increasing frequency and intensity of the Soviet raids on Petsamo and the other Luftwaffe airfields in the far north in the weeks ahead would lead to III. *Gruppe* also being re-equipped with the more potent Bf 109G.

On 2 March an unsuspecting Douglas Boston, caught just as it was about to touch down on an airfield south of Murmansk, provided Feldwebel Walter Schuck with his 25th kill. That same day

Oberleutnant Gerd Senoner, the *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 5, suffered engine damage while escorting a small force of *Jabos* targeting Soviet coastal shipping. Senoner managed to coax his crippled machine back to land, but then had to put it down some 60 kilometres inside enemy territory. Strapping on the short skis that were an essential part of every Arctic flyer's survival pack, Senoner set off towards the German lines. He was fortunate enough to be found and picked up by a Fieseler Storch along the way.

Clearly suffering no ill effects from the experience, Oberleutnant Senoner was one of the pilots scrambled to break up the first of 5 March's two Soviet raids on Petsamo. Taking off as the first bombs were already falling, Senoner returned from a lengthy pursuit with Arctic victory number one – identified as a P-39 Airacobra – tucked safely under his belt.

Although it was still relatively early in the year, another slight but noticeable easing of the weather led to a further escalation in aerial activity. The Soviets'

growing strength was evidenced by the number of bombing raids they were now mounting. And another result of this increased belligerency on the part of the enemy was that it provided renewed opportunities for JG 5's leading *Experten* to add to their personal totals. Multiple kills began to reappear. And no scoresheet lengthened quite so rapidly during the first half of March as that of ex-*Zerstörer* pilot Leutnant Theo Weissenberger. In a little over a week he more than doubled his existing tally of victories claimed since converting to the Bf 109.

Weissenberger's latest string of successes began on 6 March. Having claimed a LaGG-3 during a morning Stuka escort mission on that date, he went on to add a trio of Kittyhawks in a similar operation in the early afternoon. Four days later, having in the meantime transferred from Alakurtti up to Salmijärvi (the satellite field about ten minutes' flying time to the southwest of Petsamo), 6./JG 5 carried out a fighter sweep of the Murmansk area. It was challenged by a mixed force of some 30 Soviet fighters. Despite their numerical advantage, the enemy pilots paid dearly for their daring, reportedly losing well over a quarter of their strength. Among the known claimants were Leutnant Theo Weissenberger, who was credited with three Airacobras and a pair of P-40s (some references have even added a third P-40 to Weissenberger's tally on this date), and Feldwebel Hans Döbrich, who netted a Kittyhawk and a Hurricane.

On 12 March, while escorting the Bf 110s of 13.(Z)/JG 5 on a strike against the Soviet airfield at Murmashi, the *Expertenstaffel* took yet further toll of the enemy. And once again Theo Weissenberger and Hans Döbrich were among those making claims. The former's five victories (another three P-39s and two P-40s) qualified him as a semi-centurion and took his overall total – on both Bf 110s and Bf 109s – to 53. Hans Döbrich was not far behind. His two kills on this date, a P-39 and P-40, left him just two short of his 50th.

The encounter had not been entirely one-sided, however. As the German forces withdrew, 19-victory ace Feldwebel Dietrich Weinitschke of 5./JG 5, who had accompanied the *Experten* of 6. *Staffel* on the mission and was flying as 'tail-end Charlie', was hit by a single round from a Soviet fighter. With its control cables severed, Weinitschke's Bf 109G fell away on one wing and he was forced to bail out in a hurry. Picked up by Russian troops the following day, he would endure six long years in Soviet captivity.

Theo Weissenberger, in the meantime, was going from strength to strength. On 13 March he claimed two Pe-2s in the morning and a pair of P-40s in the afternoon. The following day he added three P-39s during another *Zerstörer* escort mission to a Soviet airfield in the Murmansk region. Then nearly a week passed before his next successes – a trio of P-40s downed during a *freie Jagd* sweep to the southwest of Murmansk on 20 March, plus a single Il-2 *Shturmovik* claimed in the same area 24 hours later.

Engine trouble forced Weissenberger to abort the maximum effort mission flown against Murmansk on 23 March, but a pair of Kittyhawks claimed on this date finally took Feldwebel Hans Döbrich to his half-century;



II./JG 5's transfer from Alakurtti back up to the far north early in March 1943 was to prove fateful for 5. *Staffel*'s Unteroffizier Dietrich Weinitschke. A year earlier he had been rescued by a Storch and returned to Petsamo (pictured here) after 24 hours behind enemy lines. On 12 March 1943 he was not so fortunate. Brought down close to Murmashi, he was quickly picked up Russian troops and subjected to six years of Soviet captivity



Maintenance out in the open at Petsamo was no easy task, even when the sun was shining. On 12 March 1943, the day this photograph was taken, the thermometer was registering -30°C



Feldwebel Heinrich Bartels' *Gustav* being checked by the ever attentive 'black men'. Note the combined *Staffel* and *Gruppe* badges below the windscreen and the solid disc – also visible in the previous photograph – on the rear fuselage. This latter identified III. *Gruppe* and was carried in the respective *Staffel* colours of white, black and yellow

'I had shot down a Curtiss P-40 right at the start of the engagement. As the dogfight had developed I spotted a solitary Curtiss P-40 flying at an altitude of 1000 metres. I attacked it from behind and below, whereupon the enemy machine pulled up and away. I got onto its tail, firing short bursts at it from a range of 120-180 metres as we climbed to a height of 1200 metres. That was where the Curtiss P-40 began to pour white smoke. It rolled onto its back and went down in a spin. Sending up a huge cloud of snow on impact, it hit the ground about 14 kilometres south of Murmansk at 1423 hrs.'

Exactly five minutes prior to this, 8. *Staffel's* Feldwebel Heinrich Bartels had also claimed the first of two P-40s which, together with a single P-39 Airacobra, raised his personal tally to 49.

On 27 March Leutnant Theo Weissenberger was back on form, accounting for four of that day's 14+ victories. On this occasion, however, he was bested by the *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 5, Oberleutnant Heinrich Ehrler, who got five. Other familiar names – the likes of Hans Döbrich and centurion-to-be Feldwebel Jakob Norz – had to settle for one apiece.

Although the emphasis of this narrative is naturally focused on JG 5's successes, it should not be forgotten that the *Geschwader's* two Arctic *Gruppen* were by this time suffering a slow but steady rate of attrition of their own. In fact, 27 March also saw the last of the month's seven losses when two Unteroffiziere failed to return from the combined bomber escort and *freie Jagd* mission to the Murmansk area that had proved so fruitful

for Ehrler and Weissenberger. As might be expected, the bulk of the casualties came from the ranks of the less experienced pilots, but such was the growing strength and confidence of the enemy that soon no one would be safe.

And indeed the very next morning Leutnant Theo Weissenberger himself had a narrow escape. Scrambled to intercept an incoming *Shturmovik* raid on Petsamo, Weissenberger was able to claim

Another shot of 'Yellow 10', the mount of the *Expertenstaffel's* Feldwebel Hans Döbrich, who attained his half-century by downing a P-40 south of Murmansk on 23 March 1943



three of the Il-2s escorting Airacobras before his own 'Yellow 4' took a hit and he was forced to belly-land out on the open tundra not far from Salmijärvi. Although the machine was written off, Theo Weissenberger was unhurt and quickly found. Less than four hours later he was back in the air again.

Another *Shturmovik* strike on Petsamo the following day resulted in yet more Soviet losses, but the most notable successes of that 29 March were achieved nearly 100 kilometres to the northwest of JG 5's main Arctic base. For in addition to flying bombing raids on Murmansk and other targets on Russian soil, the Bf 110s of the *Zerstörerstaffel* were frequently called upon to carry out convoy protection duties along the region's inshore shipping lanes. It was while shepherding a small supply convoy along the rocky coast of the Varanger Peninsula that Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Kurpiers scored a remarkable 'double double'.

During the morning's patrol he had claimed a brace of Hampden torpedo-bombers (part of the small, and ever dwindling, number of machines handed over to the Russians when the two RAF Coastal Command squadrons returned to the United Kingdom by sea). And then, back on station again in the early afternoon, he added a pair of Pe-2s, which, like the Hampdens before them, had been intent on attacking the German vessels. This 'four-in-one-day' – second only to the then Oberfeldwebel Theo Weissenberger's five *Zerstörer* victories back on 10 May 1942 – took Kurpiers' final Arctic total to nine (although he would reportedly add two RAF Liberators to his tally on consecutive days late in 1944 when based on Norway's west coast).

After six days of operations, both offensive and defensive (escorting *Jabo* and *Zerstörer* raids on Russian targets as well as protecting their own airfields from the growing number of Soviet attacks), another of 6. *Staffel's Experten* had a close call. Veteran NCO Oberfeldwebel Albert Brunner had already spent four days behind enemy lines after being forced to bail out east of Murmansk back in September, but on the afternoon of 4 April things were to turn out a little differently;

'We were ordered to scramble. The enemy was making a low-level raid on a neighbouring airfield [Brunner had taken off from Salmijärvi after reports came in that Petsamo was under attack by fighter-escorted *Shturmoviki*]. I managed to bag a Tomahawk [sic] while making for the scene of the action, but then suddenly found myself in the middle of a gaggle of Airacobras.

'I waded into a bunch of four and quickly shot two of them down. By now the dogfight was spreading at low level out across the desolate tundra hills. I attacked my fourth opponent from head-on. We hurtled straight towards each other and must have opened fire at the same instant for suddenly my crate started shaking, the engine packed up and bits started flying off the wings and tail surfaces. Nothing else for it – break away and get her down fast!

Sporting a natty line in Lapp headgear, Feldwebel Rudolf Müller (right) poses deadpan beside his *Gruppenkommandeur*, Oberleutnant Horst Carganico. One of II./JG 5's true characters, Rudi Müller's loss on 19 April 1943 was keenly felt by all



Hans Döbrich features in this group shot of 6. *Staffel* pilots pictured in front of Theo Weissenberger's 'Yellow 4'. Standing, from left to right, are Feldwebel Hans Döbrich, Unteroffizier Wilhelm Gärtner, Oberleutnant Heinrich Ehrler, Oberfeldwebel Rudi Müller, Unteroffizier August Mors and Leutnant Theo Weissenberger. Sat on the wing are Feldwebel Horst Rolly (left) and Oberfeldwebel Albert Brunner



'Luckily I spotted a small lake nearby and was able to pull off a fairly smooth belly-landing on the ice. As I was in no-man's land between the forwardmost German and Russian outposts, I set my aircraft on fire to prevent it falling into enemy hands. I then waited to see what would happen next. I knew my *Staffel* comrades would soon be out searching for me, but in the meantime I was found by a group of patrolling *Gebirgsjäger* (mountain troops) who had been watching the fight from the ground.

'The *Gebirgsjäger* immediately took charge of the situation – the Soviet positions were not far away. But then two Me 109s appeared overhead and not long afterwards – and much to the *Gebirgsjägers'* utter astonishment – a Fieseler Storch landed right alongside us. It was piloted by my comrade Rudi Müller, who had come to pick me up and fly me home.'

Oberfeldwebel Albert Brunner had indeed had a lucky escape, for the Storch took off just as a vicious firefight broke out between the German patrol and a group of approaching Soviet troops. But fate was to be far less kind to his intrepid rescuer two weeks later.

Oberfeldwebel Rudolf 'Rudi' Müller was at the controls of one of the six Bf 109s of the *Expertenstaffel*, led by *Kapitän* Oberleutnant Heinrich Ehrler, that took part in a *freie Jagd* sweep of the Murmansk area on the morning of 19 April. Over Murmansk itself the Luftwaffe fighters bumped into a large mixed force of 30+ enemy P-39s and P-40s. A number of claims

were made, including two P-39s and a P-40 for Oberleutnant Ehrler, a pair of P-40s for Oberfeldwebel Albert Brunner and a single P-39 for Leutnant Theo Weissenberger. Rudi Müller was apparently also successful, for his wingman reported seeing him 'dive down into a crowd of Russian machines from above', one of which immediately burst into flames. After that Müller's No 2 lost sight of his leader. It was not until they had landed back at base that the pilots of 6./JG 5 realised that their

Oberfeldwebel Müller's Bf 109G-2/R6 sits on its belly on the surface of the frozen Lake Bolschoje after being forced down by Soviet fighters on 19 April 1943 – note the ski-equipped Po-2 biplanes behind the forlorn *Gustav*. What exactly happened to 'Rudi' Müller after his capture by the Soviets is still the subject of conjecture (via Eddie Nielinger)



most successful ace, whose current score was standing just six short of a century, was missing. A massive search and rescue operation was organised without delay, but to no avail.

It later transpired that Oberfeldwebel Rudi Müller had been shot down – probably by a P-40 – and forced to belly-land on a frozen lake to the east of Murmansk. Details of exactly what happened next are rather confused. Some references suggest that the redoubtable Müller evaded capture for some time and was only picked up when close to the frontline.

Reports on his subsequent captivity are also conflicting. One states that he was seen alive in a Soviet PoW camp two years after the end of the war. A more fanciful claim has him flying for the East German air force in the 1950s under an assumed name. But the most prosaic, and therefore most likely, explanation of Rudi Müller's ultimate fate is the report that he was shot while attempting to escape from his captors on 21 October 1943.

On 22 April, three days after Müller's loss, 6./JG 5 flew another *freie Jagd* sweep of the Murmansk region, this time covering the area north of the port up to the mouth of the Kola Inlet. And once again the 'usual suspects' featured on the list of claimants, among them Leutnant Theo Weissenberger, who was credited with a pair of Yak-1s and a single P-40. Oberleutnant Heinrich Ehrler and Oberfeldwebel Albert Brunner also got a P-40 each but, more controversially, claimed a P-51 Mustang apiece as well! Although ten ex-RAF Mustang Is were shipped to Murmansk in one of 1942's Arctic convoys, these machines were immediately sent on to the Red Air Force's main test centre near Moscow for intensive evaluation. There is no record of their later returning to the Arctic on operational service, and the true identity of Ehrler's and Brunner's victims thus remains uncertain.

April's successes had been totally overshadowed by the loss of Rudi Müller. And the following month seemed to promise little better for on 7 May Oberfeldwebel Albert Brunner's luck finally ran out. On that date more than a dozen Bf 109s of JG 5 were escorting a mixed strike force of bombers, *Jabos* and *Zerstörer* on yet another early morning raid on Murmansk when they were confronted by a group of P-39 Airacobras. At least three enemy fighters were brought down, Oberfeldwebel Heinz Beyer and Feldwebel Walter Schuck (both



Personnel from III./JG 5 crowd around the rudder of Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler's Bf 109G-2 'Yellow 12' at Petsamo shortly after he had claimed five P-40s in a single mission on 27 March 1943 to take his overall tally to 77 kills (via Eddie Nielinger)

A Bf 109F-4 of 8./JG 5 is readied for its next mission at Petsamo in the early spring of 1943. This aeroplane was the personal mount of 8. *Staffel's* first leader, Oberleutnant Hermann Segatz, who was posted in from JG 51 when 8./JG 5 was formed in January 1942. He claimed 12 victories with the *Geschwader* prior to being posted to II./JG 1 as *Gruppenkommandeur* in February 1944. Killed in action by a USAAF fighter during a Defence of the Reich mission on 6 March 1944, Segatz had claimed 34 victories by the time of his death (via Eddie Nielinger)





On 7 May 1943, just 18 days after Feldwebel Rudi Müller failed to return, the *Expertenstaffel* lost another of its stalwarts when Oberfeldwebel Albert Brunner was killed. He is seen here, left, reporting to *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Heinrich Ehrler after returning from an earlier mission and, from the serious expressions on the faces of those gathered round – including Rudi Müller (centre) – it would appear that things had not gone smoothly

of III. *Gruppe*) each being credited with one, as was Oberfeldwebel Albert Brunner – but then Brunner's own machine was hit.

The engagement, fought from a height of some 1500 metres down to ground level, was wide ranging and clearly of some duration, with nearly a quarter of an hour separating Beyer's and Schuck's kills. What is not known, however, is exactly where Brunner's final encounter with the enemy took place. Had his *Gustav* been damaged over the target area and was he trying to nurse it back to friendly territory, or had a P-39 caught him over the frontline, for that is where he fell? Whatever the circumstances, by the time Brunner was forced to abandon his machine, he was too low for his parachute to open fully and he was killed on impact with the ground. A posthumous Knight's Cross was conferred upon Oberfeldwebel Albert Brunner on 3 July 1943. He was the only serving Arctic ace to be so honoured.

Incidentally, as well as participating in the early morning bombing raid on Murmansk, 13.(Z)/JG 5 was also currently despatching pairs of Bf 110s in rotation throughout daylight hours to escort an important German coastal supply convoy and protect it from Soviet air attack. And it was during one such convoy patrol in the late afternoon of 7 May that Unteroffizier Reinhold Fiedler brought down two enemy torpedo-bombers – first an Ilyushin DB-3F and then a Hampden. The latter proved to be Fiedler's 14th, and final, kill as a *Zerstörer* pilot in the Arctic. Like Weissenberger and others before him, he too had applied for a transfer to single-engined fighters, although ultimately, after a brief period of service with 7. *Staffel*, with whom he claimed three kills, he would end the war on nightfighters.

Brunner had been the seventh pilot lost to the *Expertenstaffel* since the beginning of the year. This was roughly the equivalent of half the unit's official establishment and represented a higher casualty rate than the other two *Staffeln* of II. *Gruppe* combined (although 4. and 5./JG 5 were admittedly based for the greater part of the time to the south along the Murmansk–Moscow railway line sector). It was also more than III. *Gruppe* in its entirety. Despite the attrition, 6./JG 5's collective scoreboard continued to lengthen, thanks primarily to a small core of consistently successful pilots, among them (since the loss of Rudi Müller) the *Staffel's* new co-leading scorer, Leutnant Theo Weissenberger, who contributed a quartet of P-39 Airacobras during an early-morning *Jabo* escort mission to the mouth of the Kola Inlet on 13 May.

22 May was another day of frenetic activity, with the Bf 109s of II. and III. *Gruppen* flying at least six separate escort missions for a series of anti-shipping strikes by the Fw 190s of 14.(*Jabo*)/JG 5. And on this occasion it was the pilots of Hauptmann Günther Scholz's III./JG 5 who claimed the lion's share of the day's kills. Six of the *Gruppe's* 14 victories were credited to future centurions, with Feldwebel Walter Schuck taking his current total to 39 with a Hurricane and a trio of Airacobras and Feldwebel Jakob Norz claiming a pair of Hurricanes to add to his more modest present tally of 13.

On 23 May the *Zerstörer* of 13. *Staffel* were again engaged in convoy protection duties off the Rybachiy Peninsula. But it was a *Schwarm* of Bf 109s from 7./JG 5 scrambled in support that intercepted a formation of Soviet torpedo-bombers. *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Gerd Senoner downed a DB-3F (reportedly from a height of just five metres!), while wingman and future ace Unteroffizier Arthur Beth got one of the bombers escorting Airacobras. Senoner himself then splashed an enemy fighter – a Hurricane II – in the early hours of the following morning, sending this victim down into the sea from an altitude of 3600 metres.

June's first recorded victories were a pair of P-39 Airacobras claimed by 8. *Staffel*'s Feldwebel Jakob Norz before the month was even four hours old. 'Jockl' Norz then added another two – this time Hurricanes – on 5 June, a day which saw JG 5's fighters engaged in a number of *Jabo* escort and bomber interception missions. By its end more than 12 kills had been made. Two pilots were credited with four apiece: Feldwebel Hans Döbrich of the *Expertenstaffel* accounted for two pairs of Hurricanes in consecutive sorties, while Oberleutnant Wulf-Dietrich Widowitz, the *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 5, got all of his in just over 16 minutes. He initially downed a brace of MiG-3s 'at low level', followed by a Pe-2 and a Hurricane both from the giddy height of 2000 metres!

Several other pilots claimed single successes, with Leutnant Walter Geisen's P-39 Airacobra being victory number five, earning him ace status. Finally, reports of four Hurricanes claimed on 5 June brought the newly promoted Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler to just one short of his century. It would be another 72 hours before he reached the coveted three figures, however, and the exact identity of the victim that made him the *Geschwader*'s – and the Arctic's – first centurion remains something of a mystery.

It was during a *freie Jagd* sweep to the northeast of Murmansk late in the afternoon of 8 June that the pilots of the *Expertenstaffel* encountered a large mixed group of almost 50 P-39 Airacobras and what they described at the time as 'Typhoons'. Their collective powers of recognition clearly left a lot to be desired, for no British Typhoons were ever supplied to the Soviet Union. Whatever they were, the opposing fighters received quite a mauling at the hands of 6./JG 5, who claimed the destruction of more than a dozen of the so-called 'Typhoons' in just a quarter of an hour.

It was the now Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger who carved the biggest swathe through the enemy's ranks, getting the first at exactly 1715 hrs and then adding another three – plus an unwary P-39 for good measure – all in the space of the next eight minutes. Two NCO pilots, both of them future aces, were also among the claimants. Unteroffizier August Mors' trio of 'Typhoons' took his score to eight, while the one downed by Feldwebel Horst Rolly was the second in a career that would see his overall tally climb to more than 20 by the time he was killed in action on 2 November 1944. By then he was flying the revolutionary Me 163 *Komet* rocket-fighter as a member of JG 400 in Defence of the Reich operations.



The 'white stick' held by the now Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler is, in fact, his victory stick so densely packed with victory rings that there is hardly any space between them. The exact number is hard to count, even on the original print, but it must be approaching the 100 mark – the total Ehrler reached on 8 June 1943 to make him the Arctic's first centurion

But it was the seventh of the day's 'Typhoons' – which, with hindsight, were almost certainly Hurricanes – that gave rise to the greatest celebrations back at base. For this had been claimed by *Staffelkapitän* Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler, taking his total to 100 and firmly establishing his current position as the Arctic's leading *Experte*.

The *Geschwader's* second-highest scorer was also making his mark, however, and a week later the 91-victory Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 5, replacing Oberleutnant Gerd Senoner who returned to the west coast of Norway to head 1. *Staffel*.

On 15 June – the day Theo Weissenberger assumed command of 7./JG 5 – the *Experten* of 6. *Staffel* were once again in action. During the course of yet another *freie Jagd* sweep of the area around Murmansk they intercepted a group of P-39 Airacobras. Feldwebel Hans Döbrich claimed two of the enemy fighters while Unteroffizier August Mors, Weissenberger's erstwhile wingman, managed to down one before his own machine was severely damaged and he was forced to bail out southwest of Murmansk. An immediate search was organised but found no trace of the missing Mors. In fact, despite being slightly wounded, he had already set out on the three-day trek that would see him reach friendly territory, where he was picked up and flown back to Kirkenes. By this time, however, 6./JG 5 had already vacated Salmijärvi and transferred down to operate alongside 4. and 5. *Staffeln* in the Murmansk–Moscow railway line sector. It was here that Unteroffizier August Mors would rejoin his unit after a short spell of convalescence.

Meanwhile, in the far north, it was almost as if the departure of the *Expertenstaffel* had opened the floodgates to let the pilots of III. *Gruppe* show what they could do. 9./JG 5 certainly made hay while the (midnight) sun shone early on the morning of 19 June, claiming 11 enemy aircraft destroyed in the 15 minutes from 0150 hrs to 0205 hrs. *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Wulf-Dietrich Widowitz was credited with six of them – four P-39s and a pair of Bostons. Unteroffizier Hans Thomann's trio of Hurricanes took his total to seven (and made him an ace in the process), while a P-39 and a Hurricane still left Leutnant Hans-Bruno Diepen one short of acedom.

To the south, 6./JG 5 was already indulging in its favourite *freie Jagd* tactics, the only difference being that its pilots were no longer targeting the Murmansk area but the region around the important railway town of Kandalaksha on the shores of the White Sea, and its clutch of nearby airfields. Their fortunes would prove to be mixed, to say the least.

On 20 June Feldwebel Hans Döbrich was credited with a Hurricane close to Kandalaksha. It was his 60th victory. Twenty-four hours later he added a pair of Kittyhawks in the same area. Among several other claimants on that 21 June was the *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 5, who succeeded in bringing down a low-flying P-39 Airacobra before his own *Gustav* was hit in the radiator. Hauptmann Ehrler managed to gain enough height to take to his parachute and was seen to land safely near one of the many lakes in the region. An Arado floatplane, escorted by eight Bf 109s, was immediately despatched on a rescue mission. It touched down on the lake where Hauptmann Ehrler had last been seen waving up at his comrades, but now there was no sign of him. He was obviously – and very wisely – keeping well under cover as a number of

enemy troops had arrived on the scene. Despite receiving some slight damage from small-arms fire, the Arado was able to take off again, albeit with the rear seat still empty.

Another attempt was made two hours later, this time with an escort of 15 Bf 109s. While the fighters kept the enemy's heads down by hosing the edges of the lake and the approaches to it with cannon and machine gun fire, the Arado successfully picked up one very relieved *Staffelkapitän* and flew him back to his unit.

On 22 June it was the turn of 7./JG 5 in the north to dominate the scoring. Led by Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger, the unit's new *Staffelkapitän* of just one week's standing, 7. *Staffel*'s pilots were ordered to make a mid-morning sweep of the area to the south of Murmansk. As they approached, telltale clouds of dust rising from one of the airfields below revealed that large numbers of enemy fighters were taking off to challenge them. Curving around in order to position the sun at their backs, the Bf 109 pilots dived to the attack and a ferocious free-for-all quickly developed. When it ended 20 minutes later, 12 Hurricanes and a single Airacobra had been shot down.

Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger and Oberfeldwebel Erich Beulich got three each, the *Staffelkapitän*'s trio of Hurricanes being claimed during a 15-minute dogfight in the vicinity of Kola railway station, one of the first stops on the line south of Murmansk. Oberfeldwebel Beulich had opened the proceedings at 0925 hrs by downing a Hurricane for his first Arctic victory (he had claimed a pair of Beauforts off southwest Norway a year earlier). He was then responsible for a second Hurricane, and the sole Airacobra, later in the fight. Two pilots, Leutnant Walter Geisen and Feldwebel Bernhard von Hermann, were credited with a pair of Hurricanes apiece, while three others each claimed a single victory.

All seven of those taking part in the 22 June engagement – 'the first big success of our *Staffel*', as one member of 7./JG 5 later described it – already were, or would soon become, Arctic aces. But it is indicative of the way the balance of power in the far northern regions was slowly but surely turning in favour of the Soviets that every single one of them, with the exception of *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger, would be reported either killed, missing or captured within the next ten months. In fact, the first of those casualties had already occurred. After claiming his two Hurricanes (victories numbers six and seven), Leutnant Walter Geisen had been forced to abandon his own badly damaged machine. However, as was so often the case in the low-level dogfights that were such a regular feature of the air war in the Arctic, he had insufficient height for his parachute to open.

On 23 June Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger repeated his previous day's performance by downing another three enemy fighters – Airacobras this time – while wingman Oberfeldwebel Erich Beulich had to be content with just one.

June's final successes were claimed by the same NCO pilot of 8. *Staffel*, who had opened the month's scoresheet with a pair of P-39s. The two Pe-2s and single P-40 sent down into the sea off the Varanger Peninsula on the afternoon of 29 June took future centurion Feldwebel Jakob Norz's current total to 23. Promoted in the meantime to Oberfeldwebel, 'Jockl' Norz claimed another trio of kills – two more Pe-2s plus a Boston this

time – in III./JG 5's next major clash with the enemy, which took place during a convoy escort operation on the evening of 4 July.

But it was the pilots of 7. *Staffel* that did the real damage during this action as relays of them escorted the outbound vessels northwards along the coast of the Rybachiy Peninsula. Surpassing even their 'first big success' of 22 June, the pilots claimed no fewer than 15 enemy aircraft destroyed in less than 20 minutes. And, unusually, not one of their victims was a fighter – all were bombers or attack aircraft trying to get through to the convoy.

Almost half the day's successes were credited to just one man. *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger had already downed a reconnaissance Petlyakov before the main assault came in. When the attack did begin, he quickly accounted for a trio of Il-2s, the second of which provided him with his century. But there was no time for Weissenberger to rest on his laurels. The celebrations would come later. Another wave of torpedo-bombers was already approaching, and the ex-*Zerstörer* pilot turned fighter ace brought a memorable day to a close by adding three Hampdens to his ever lengthening list of victories.

Four more Hampdens were claimed by the pilots of 7./JG 5, together with a brace each of Il-2s and Pe-2s, plus a single Boston. It is not known if any vessels of the convoy were damaged or sunk, but whatever success the attackers may have achieved had been very dearly bought.

The month had undoubtedly begun on a high note, but it was not to last. 9 July's only recorded kill – an Il-2 downed over Varanger Fjord by 6. *Staffel's* Oberfeldwebel Hans Döbrich – was more than offset by the loss of two III. *Gruppe* pilots who were shot into the sea off the Rybachiy Peninsula. Three days later, another early morning convoy protection mission resulted in seven victories for III./JG 5, including two for the *Kapitän* of 9. *Staffel*, Oberleutnant Wulf-Dietrich Widowitz – an Il-2 caught and despatched 'at wavetop height' and then a Kittyhawk shot down from all of 100 metres. But 7./JG 5 was lucky not to lose two of its rising stars when Oberfeldwebel Franz Dörr and Unteroffizier Richard Steinbach were forced to abandon their machines over Varanger Fjord. For the record, the loss of the two Bf 109s was officially put down to 'technical malfunction'. However, it is more than likely that they were involved in a minor mid-air collision of some sort, which resulted in both pilots having to bail out.

16 July was another day of mixed fortunes. Following an emergency scramble from Petsamo shortly before 0100 hrs, 8. *Staffel's* Oberfeldwebel Jakob Norz downed two P-39 Airacobras that took his score to 29. At about the same time fellow Oberfeldwebel Hans Döbrich of 6./JG 5 was claiming a pair of P-40s close to the Rybachiy Peninsula, some 40 kilometres to the northeast. Döbrich then spotted a third enemy fighter and climbed towards it, but victory No 66 was to elude him. His engine had been damaged during the low-level encounter with the two Kittyhawks and spluttered to a stop at 5000 metres just as he was about to launch an attack on his intended victim.

In an instant the hunter had become the hunted. Realising that his opponent was in difficulties, the Russian pilot immediately gave chase as the crippled Bf 109G dived away with its propeller windmilling. Döbrich was desperately trying to reach friendly territory – or at least get out over open water. By then others had been attracted to the scene;



Pictured earlier in the year – hence the winter camouflage – Theo Weissenberger taxis his Bf 109G-2 'gunboat' out of its timber blast pen under the watchful eye of his crew chief (and temporary guardian of his victory stick) at the start of yet another lengthy convoy escort mission (note the long-range fuel tank). Weissenberger took his 'Yellow 4' with him when he was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 5 in mid-June 1943, and scored his century in it on 4 July

'When I looked over my shoulder I saw, 50 metres behind me, an American P-40 and a MiG with its cannons [sic] blazing. The MiG shot past beneath me. I pulled the nose up in an attempt to turn in towards the P-40 but received a full burst for my pains. My right wing caught fire and I myself was wounded in the face and leg.'

Döbrich was still trying to reach the safety of German-held territory, but with his machine now well ablaze and down to a height of just 300 metres, he had no option but to bail out. By this time he was some 20 kilometres off the Rybachiy coast and, fortunately, had been spotted by a nearby German convoy. Although machine-gunned in the water while struggling to free himself from his parachute, Döbrich received no further injuries. The presence of the enemy fighters prevented the flying boat that was protecting the convoy from landing and picking him up, however. He was eventually rescued by one of the convoy's surface escorts.

Oberfeldwebel Hans Döbrich was to spend many months in hospital recovering from his wounds and severe burns, and it was while there – on 19 September 1943 – that he was presented with the Knight's Cross for his 65 victories. He later returned to active duty, but did not fly operationally again.

Another emergency scramble from Petsamo at 0100 hrs on 18 July resulted in 7. *Staffel*'s Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger and his wingman being confronted by a Soviet force of 18 Hurricanes and Yak-1s. Despite the odds, Weissenberger waded straight in, bringing down two of the enemy machines – victories Nos 105 and 106 – both of which he mis-identified as P-39 Airacobras.

A late evening scramble on 22 July saw Leutnant Franz Dörr, another 7. *Staffel* pilot, claim a pair of Hurricanes. Of more interest, perhaps, was the fact that Dörr's wingman, Unteroffizier Helmut Neumann, also got a Hurricane. Although he had been engaged in Arctic operations for almost a year now, this was Neumann's first victory. He was another of that select band of highly dependable NCO wingmen who flew almost exclusively in the

Keeping a close eye on things, Oberfeldwebel Hans Döbrich watches as mechanics service the DB 603 engine of his 'Yellow 10'. It was damage to this engine during an encounter with P-40s off the coast of the Rybachiy Peninsula on 16 July that forced him to bail out, bringing an end to an operational career that had seen him amass 65 kills (again, note the presence of the victory stick)



'No 2' slot, guarding the tails of sundry *Experten* while they achieved the successes. Now that Neumann had broken his duck and had one kill under his belt, there was no holding him. Over the next few weeks he rapidly added another eight before a serious wound kept him off ops for seven months. Neumann would end the war as a *Leutnant*, sporting the Knight's Cross, and with a final tally of 62 enemy aircraft to his credit.

In fact, *Unteroffizier* Helmut Neumann claimed his next two victims, *Airacobras* this time, just three days later. But the honours during the fierce, ten-minute skirmish fought southeast of Kiberg in the early hours of 25 July undoubtedly went to *Oberleutnant* Theo Weissenberger, whose two *Airacobras* and three *Pe-2s* accounted for exactly half the enemy aircraft destroyed.

That same 25 July also witnessed the *Zerstörerstaffel's* last major success in the far north when a *Schwarm* of *Bf 110s* escorting a convoy out of Varanger Fjord managed to bring down four attacking *Pe-2s*. For one of the pilots involved, *Oberleutnant* Hans Kirchmeier, it was victory number four, and it would take another 15 months and conversion to single-engined fighters before he added the all-important fifth.

On 28 July *Oberfeldwebel* Heinz Beyer of 8./JG 5 claimed a solitary high-flying *Pe-2*. It was to be Beyer's last victory in the far north (although references as to his exact final total range from 27 to 33), for shortly afterwards he was retired from operations on grounds of ill health and was seconded as a pilot to the Messerschmitt works.

28 July was also the day on which 9./JG 5 lost its *Staffelkapitän* when *Oberleutnant* Wulf-Dietrich Widowitz crashed due to unknown causes southwest of Petsamo while making a routine flight in a *Gotha Go 145* light aircraft. His replacement was *Hauptmann* Hans-Hermann Schmidt who, like Theo Weissenberger, had transferred from the *Zerstörerstaffel* to single-engined fighters. Having commanded a training *Staffel* in the south of France for the past seven months, Schmidt's unexpected recall back up to the Arctic – even in midsummer – must have come as quite a shock!

Staffelkapitän Heinrich Ehrler's 'Yellow 12' sits in the summer sun, possibly at Alakurtti, awaiting repairs to the port wing. What caused the damage is not known, but it has all the hallmarks of a ground accident. The 'black man' resting his back against the main wheel clearly is not in the least bothered



While the air campaign above the Arctic Circle may have been something of a ‘forgotten war’ as far as the general public in Germany was concerned, official recognition was clearly not lacking. Indeed, at the end of July the northern theatre’s two most successful pilots, Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler and Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger, the *Kapitäne* of 6. and 7. *Staffeln*, respectively, were summoned to the Reich, where, on 2 August, they were presented with the Oak Leaves to the Knight’s Cross by the *Führer* himself. At the time of their awards both men had scores standing at 112.

The far north remained uncharacteristically quiet during the first half of August. Only two confirmed kills were recorded in this period – a pair of Airacobras claimed on the 10th that took 7. *Staffel*’s Feldwebel Helmut Klante into double figures.

It had been a very different story just 24 hours earlier on the Murmansk–Moscow railway sector when 6./JG 5, which had transferred from Salmijärvi back down to Alakurtti only the previous day, encountered an untidy gaggle of nearly a dozen antiquated I-153 biplanes close to the Soviet airfield at Loukhi and downed six of them in as many minutes. Two of the *Staffel*’s NCO pilots were credited with a brace apiece. For Feldwebel Horst Rolly they were entries Nos 7 and 8 on his personal scoresheet, and for Unteroffizier August Mors Nos 10 and 11.

Loukhi was to be the scene of another engagement involving 6./JG 5 nine days later when, on 18 August, *Staffelkapitän* Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler added three more victories to the 112 that had just won him the Oak Leaves (for some reason fellow Oak Leaves recipient Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger would not claim his next kills until mid-October).

18 August was also a busy day for III./JG 5 in the far north. By its end the *Gruppe* had downed 15 enemy fighters. Among them, one Airacobra provided the first victory for future ace Unteroffizier Peter Rohde of 7. *Staffel*. An Airacobra and a Hurricane took 9./JG 5’s Feldwebel Walter Schuck to 42, while a pair of Airacobras and a Kittyhawk raised Leutnant Franz Dörr’s tally to 16. The day’s laurels, however, went to another 7. *Staffel* pilot, Unteroffizier Arthur Beth, whose four victims – all Airacobras – almost doubled his existing score, taking him from five to nine during the course of two separate sorties.

The most notable of all was the last of the day’s kills, for this – another Kittyhawk – had been claimed by III./JG 5’s *Gruppenkommandeur*, Major Günther Scholz. Although Major Scholz had led the *Gruppe* since its inception nearly 18 months earlier, this was only his sixth Arctic victory. It would also prove to be the last of the 32 kills credited to Günther Scholz in total. He had achieved acedom by downing a Spitfire at the height of the Battle of Britain three years earlier when serving as the *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 54.

Although a number of missions were flown on 19 August, no kills were recorded. That day did see the loss of another ace, however. 9. *Staffel*’s Feldwebel Hans Thomann had claimed his first victory on 2 December 1942 and had since added seven more. He may well have gone on to even greater things had his career not been cut short when he was shot down in error by the flak defences of Kirkenes.

19 August was also the date on which Hauptmann Friedrich-Wilhelm Strakeljahn, the *Staffelkapitän* of 14. (*Jabo*)/JG 5, was awarded the Knight’s



On 2 August 1943 Adolf Hitler presented the Arctic’s two centurions with the Oak Leaves to their Knight’s Crosses. The decoration is clearly visible in this informal shot of a beaming Heinrich Ehrler . . .



... while Theo Weissenberger – seen here prior to the award – looks altogether more thoughtful as he is strapped into his machine

Cross. Strakeljahn's nine aerial victories had all been gained prior to his assuming command of the *Jabostaffel*, and the decoration was primarily in recognition of his leadership of the *Geschwader's* Fw 190 fighter-bombers in their highly successful anti-shipping operations ('Straks' himself had been instrumental in the sinking of at least ten enemy vessels).

Following an emergency scramble from Petsamo in the early hours of 23 August, 7. and 8. *Staffeln* intercepted an enemy force reported to be approaching a coastal convoy, and claimed ten of the attackers shot down at the rate of one a minute. Among their victims were two more of the Soviet Arctic Fleet's few remaining Hampdens, one of which (together with a Pe-2) fell to the guns of Oberfeldwebel Josef 'Jockl' Norz. Another pilot to get a double was Leutnant Franz Dörr, who was also credited with a Pe-2 and one of the escorting Kittyhawks.

The final week of August remained relatively calm, with only a handful of confirmed kills being recorded. Activity began to pick up again during the first half of September, however, when II. *Gruppe* claimed ten enemy aircraft destroyed and III./JG 5 was credited with almost double that number. Somewhat surprisingly, the *Experten* of 6. *Staffel* did not figure very prominently in these totals, managing only two kills. One of them – a Boston downed on 6 September – gave Feldwebel Horst Rolly his tenth victory.

III./JG 5's list of claimants contained several familiar names. Leutnant Franz Dörr got a Kittyhawk on 2 September, Oberfeldwebel Jakob Norz downed a trio of Bostons four days later and Feldwebel Walter Schuck despatched a pair of Hurricanes on 3 September and then added three P-40s on the 12th to bring his score up to 47. Another NCO pilot of 9. *Staffel* also claimed a trio of Kittyhawks on 12 September. They became the first three entries on Unteroffizier Hermann Amend's hitherto virgin scoresheet – an impressive start!

It was at this juncture that a number of command changes took place. *Geschwaderkommodore* Oberstleutnant Gotthard Handrick left to take up the office of *Jafü Ostmark* (Fighter-Leader Austria). Although a veteran of the *Legion Condor*, the 34-year-old Handrick was perhaps unique among eastern front fighter *Kommodores* in not claiming a single victory during his long tenure in command of *Jagdgeschwader* 5. The officer selected to replace the departing Oberstleutnant Handrick was Major Günther Scholz, which in turn left a vacancy at the head of III./JG 5. This was filled by appointing the *Kapitän* of 6./JG 5, Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler, as the new *Kommandeur* of III. *Gruppe*. Finally, Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger – who had been commanding 7./JG 5 for the past three months – was recalled to the *Expertenstaffel* as *Kapitän* of 6./JG 5, leaving Leutnant Franz Dörr to take over at the head of 7. *Staffel*.

The calm that had prevailed during much of the first part of the month was shattered early in the evening of 14 September. Scrambled to protect the vital shipping supply lanes from a series of sudden and determined Soviet air attacks, the pilots of II. and III. *Gruppen* brought down 30 enemy aircraft – more than the entire total claimed during the month to date – in just over 30 minutes. 6./JG 5 was not involved on this occasion, but 4. and 5. *Staffeln* accounted for 11 of the attackers, five of them heavily armoured Il-2 *Shturmoviki*, while Feldwebel Alfred Lehner was responsible for a pair of DB-3 torpedo-bombers that brought his total to 13.

III. *Gruppe's* roll call of claimants was headed by Feldwebel Walter Schuck, whose three Airacobras and single Il-2 – all downed over Varanger Fjord – took him past the half-century mark. Others credited with multiple kills were 7. *Staffel's* Leutnant Franz Dörr (two Il-2s and a P-40) and Feldwebel Helmut Klante (an Il-2, an Airacobra and a P-40). The action also saw an Il-2 provide a first victory for 7. *Staffel's* Oberfähnrich Karl-Heinrich Vögel, while 5./JG 5's Leutnant Christian Erdmann clinched ace status by bringing down an Airacobra for his fifth. The day was marred, however, by the loss of another of the *Geschwader's* band of 'old guard' NCOs. Ten-victory Oberfeldwebel Erich Beulich of 7. *Staffel* was posted missing after his 'White 14' was last seen battling 15 Airacobras above a convoy off the west coast of the Rybachiy Peninsula.

This increased level of activity was to continue for the remainder of the month, with the two *Gruppen* accounting for a further 80 or so enemy aircraft between them. Nearly three-quarters of that number were claimed in the course of just three short, sharp actions alone.

The first of these occurred on the afternoon of 20 September, and again involved the protection of coastal shipping. A force of about 12 Bostons, with a strong fighter escort, was reported to be approaching a convoy that was rounding the northern tip of the Varanger Peninsula. Elements of both *Gruppen* were hurriedly scrambled to reinforce the Bf 109s already on standing patrol above the vessels. Battle was joined before the enemy could inflict any damage on the convoy, and nine of the Bostons were shot down in quick succession, with Feldwebel Walter Schuck claiming two of the three credited to III. *Gruppe*. Again there was a price to pay, with Leutnant Manfred Stahlschmidt, the TO (Technical Officer) of *Stab* II./JG 5, being forced to bail out of his damaged *Gustav* 40 kilometres northeast of Vardø. An intensive search was carried out but no trace of him was ever found.

Three days later the focus of the action moved inland when, shortly after midday on 23 September, the machines of III. *Gruppe*, together with those of 6./JG 5, flew escort for the Fw 190 *Jabos* of 14. *Staffel* in an attack on enemy fighter airfields around Murmansk. As was to be expected, the Soviets rose in strength to defend their home bases and the Bf 109s were confronted by large numbers of Kittyhawks and Airacobras. In the frantic ten-minute melee that immediately erupted, 14 enemy fighters were shot out of the sky – this time without loss to the *Geschwader*.

6. *Staffel* contributed three Airacobras to the day's total – a pair for Unteroffizier August Mors (Nos 12 and 13 on his personal scoresheet) and a singleton for Feldwebel Horst Rolly. III. *Gruppe* also claimed two Airacobras, with its remaining nine victims all being Kittyhawks. Heading the list of successful pilots was the now seemingly unstoppable, newly promoted Oberfeldwebel Walter Schuck with four (55-58), closely followed by Oberfeldwebel 'Jockl' Norz, whose trio on this date took him to 40.

The same names dominated the units' scoreboards the following morning, 24 September, when every available machine was scrambled to intercept an approaching 'horde' of Airacobras, Hurricanes and Kittyhawks. And this time JG 5's pilots inflicted even greater slaughter on the enemy, bringing down 27 of their number in less than 40 minutes! The two 6. *Staffel*



Hauptmann Günther Scholz (centre) is pictured here officiating at some kind of ceremony – possibly a marriage by proxy if the flowers on the table are any indication. During his 30 months' service with JG 5, initially as *Kommandeur* of III. *Gruppe* and then as *Geschwaderkommodore*, Hauptmann (later Major) Scholz claimed just six victories. Note the unit badges above the doorway

NCOs, Feldwebel Horst Rolly and Unteroffizier August Mors, again figured prominently, the former being credited with three victories (an Airacobra and a pair of Hurricanes) and the latter with two (both Hurricanes).

III./JG 5 was responsible for 16 of the claims made. 'Jockl' Norz and Walter Schuck got a pair of P-40s each, bringing their scores up to 42 and 59, respectively. But both were overshadowed by Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler, whose Kittyhawk – his first victory since being appointed *Kommandeur* of the *Gruppe* – took him to 116.

Following an emergency scramble shortly after midday on 26 September, three pilots of 9. *Staffel* claimed an Airacobra each. For Leutnant Friedrich Schumann it was his seventh, and final, victory. It is not clear what then happened to him, but when he failed to return to Petsamo an immediate search was organised. This was to prove very nearly fatal for nine-victory ace Unteroffizier Helmut Neumann of 7./JG 5, whose machine was hit by flak to the southeast of Litsa Bay. Although the aircraft was only slightly damaged, Neumann himself suffered a serious neck wound. He nonetheless managed to make it back to Petsamo, where he had to be lifted from the cockpit of

his 'White 9' weak from the loss of blood. After a long period in hospital he made a full recovery and finally returned to ops in the late spring of 1944.

Petsamo was again targeted early the next morning, 27 September, by a mixed force of 30 bombers and ground-assault aircraft. Scrambled in response, the pilots of 7. *Staffel* succeeded in bringing down seven of the attackers. Feldwebel Helmut Klante was credited with a pair of Il-2s and one of the escorting P-40s, while Feldwebel Reinhold Fiedler downed an Il-2 and an Airacobra. This put the two Feldwebeln on level pegging with 17 victories each. It should perhaps be pointed out, however, that Fiedler's first 14 kills had all been gained while serving with the *Zerstörerstaffel* and prior to his conversion to single-seaters. His first success with the Bf 109 had, in fact, been achieved less than a fortnight earlier – an Airacobra shot down over the mouth of Varanger Fjord during the convoy actions of 14 September.

The last of 27 September's seven victories were two Pe-2s, these being claimed by Oberfähnrich Karl-Heinrich Vögel and added to his first kill – an Il-2 likewise downed during the 14 September coastal fracas.

October opened in very similar fashion to the previous month with relatively little activity and only seven kills claimed (three of them by 8. *Staffel*'s Leutnant Hans-Bruno Diepen) in the first 12 days. All that was to change on 13 October.

Once again, the action was triggered by the need to protect the all-important inshore shipping lanes. Shortly after midday on that 13 October all available aircraft were scrambled to help defend a vital supply convoy that was making its way down the east coast of the Varanger Peninsula

and was reported to be in danger of imminent air attack. The first of II./JG 5's fighters arrived on the scene just as the leading wave of Il-2s was boring in only some 50 metres above the surface of the water. The *Kapitän* of 6. *Staffel*, Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger, promptly splashed three of the enemy machines in as many minutes. These were his first victories since being awarded the Oak Leaves back at the beginning of August. He then went on to down a pair of Bostons, which took his overall score to 117 and nudged him one ahead of fellow Oak Leaves recipient Heinrich Ehrler.

Among the others contributing to II. *Gruppe*'s 12 kills was Feldwebel Alfred Lehner with three (a Pe-2 plus two Airacobras), while an Il-2 provided the first Arctic victory for future ace Oberleutnant Rudolf Glöckner. III./JG 5's known claimants on this date included Oberfeldwebel Walter Schuck and Unteroffizier Arthur Beth with three apiece, and Leutnant Franz Dörr with two (giving this trio of III. *Gruppe* luminaries totals of 63, 12 and 26, respectively).

Several days of bad weather meant that it was 19 October before the next clash occurred, this time in defence of a convoy off the Rybachiy Peninsula. Only a handful of claims resulted, however, with 7. *Staffel*'s Leutnant Franz Dörr and Feldwebel Alfred Lehner of 5./JG 5 both being credited with an Il-2 and a P-40. The weather then closed in again for much of the remainder of the month, with just two known kills being recorded. Then, despite the continuing snowstorms, all available aircraft were scrambled shortly after midday on 3 November to protect an incoming convoy. The pilots of III. *Gruppe* soon found themselves embroiled with a sizeable mixed force of enemy fighters. Among the four named claimants were Leutnant Franz Dörr and Unteroffizier Arthur Beth, both of whom identified their opponents as 'Mustangs' – possibly the two Yaks admitted lost by the Soviets on this date?

II./JG 5's seven successes included an Il-2, which took Leutnant Helmut Koschack into double figures, and an Airacobra that was a first for ace-to-be Leutnant Ernst Scheufele. Finally, it was one of the Soviets' dwindling supply of Hurricanes, shot into the sea seven kilometres off the tip of the Rybachiy Peninsula, that gave Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger victory number 118.

Although none of the participants knew it, the action of 3 November marked the end of an era for II./JG 5. Within days the *Gruppe* would

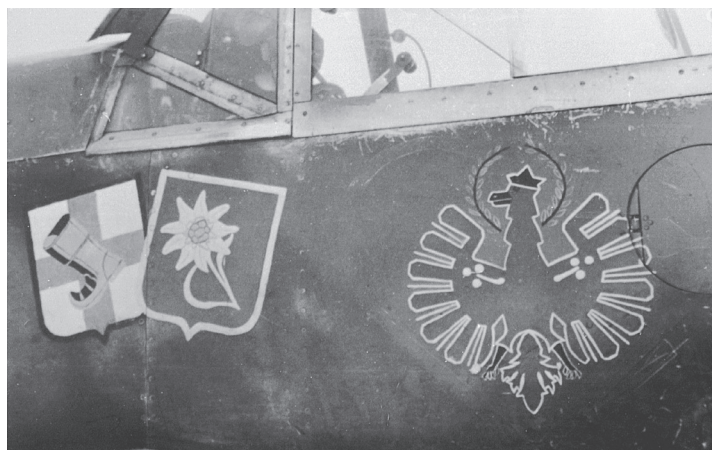


Perhaps the closest the Luftwaffe ever came to replicating the legendary pin-ups that adorned so many of the bombers and fighters of the USAAF's 'Mighty Eighth' was this scantily-clad but sour-faced witch painted on the nacelle of Oberleutnant Günther Schwanecke's *Gustav* (see colour profile 28) during his time as *Gruppen-Adjutant* of II./JG 5 in the latter half of 1943



Future centurion Oberleutnant Franz Dörr, pictured here in 1942 in his *Friedrich* 'White 4', took over from Theo Weissenberger as the *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 5 on 14 September 1943. Note the twin badges below the windscreen, the Lapp boot of III. *Gruppe* to the left and the lion rampant of 7. *Staffel* on the right

The 8. *Staffel*'s badge consisted of a yellow Edelweiss on a dark brown shield, and it is seen on this Bf 109F partially overlapping III./JG 5's Lapp boot insignia. The spread-eagle emblem was applied in red (outlined in white) onto a number of 8. *Staffel* aircraft in memory of Hauptmann Alfred Pomaska, who was killed in France in 1940. His association with the unit remains unexplained (via *Eddie Nielinger*)



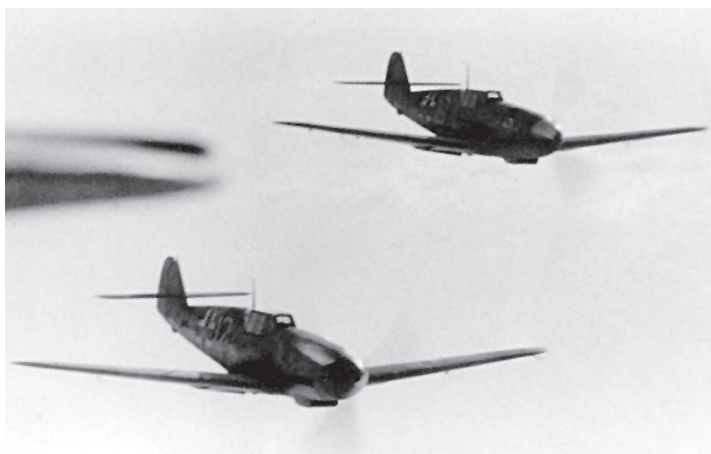
leave the Arctic and be transferred down to the main eastern front, where, in the wake of the Battle of Kursk (fought and lost four months earlier), German forces were beginning the long retreat that would see them pushed all the way back to Berlin. After their long entrenchment at Petsamo, the war of movement that characterised the eastern front proper was a totally new experience for most members of Hauptmann Horst Carganico's II./JG 5. Initially based at Idritsa on the northern sector – from where it flew its first operation on 8 December, claiming 21 victories! – the *Gruppe* was subsequently moved down to the central sector for a brief spell, before being ordered back north up into the Baltic states early in 1944.

The departure of II./JG 5 meant that the defence of the Arctic regions now rested solely on the shoulders of Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler's III. *Gruppe* at Petsamo (with a small detachment maintaining a token presence at Alakurtti) and the Bf 110s of 13.(Z)/JG 5 – commanded since 1 November by Hauptmann Herbert Treppe – based at Kirkenes.

And it was a coordinated enemy raid on these two airfields, Petsamo and Kirkenes, that sparked the last major Arctic air battle of 1943. When the first of the 16 Il-2s swept in over Petsamo shortly before midday on 25 November, the Fw 190s of the *Jabostaffel* were just about to take off on a bombing mission. Most of the pilots jumped from their cockpits and ran for cover, but at least two managed to get into the air and, what

Bf 109F 'Black 4', flown by Feldwebel Ernst Schulze of 8./JG 5, overturned while attempting to crash-land at Petsamo after it was damaged by a Soviet fighter. Schulze gained the first of his 12 Arctic kills on 13 March 1943. It would be the end of the year before he got his second (via *Eddie Nielinger*)





Unlike his predecessor, Major Günther Scholz, Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler built up a considerable score while serving as *Gruppenkommandeur* of III./JG 5, adding a further 47 kills to the 71 he had already claimed as the *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 5. This aerial shot shows him (left) in his favoured 'Yellow 12' with his – unfortunately unidentified – wingman in close attendance flying 'Yellow 8'

is more, were credited with bringing down two of the attackers – an Il-2 and an Airacobra. The *Shturmovik* was claimed by Oberfeldwebel August 'Richard' Luy (who already had a trio of kills under his belt from his previous service flying Bf 109s as a member of 9./JG 5). These two enemy aircraft were the only aerial victories achieved by the *Jabostaffel* during the whole of 1943.

As was to be expected, the pilots of III. *Gruppe* inflicted far greater damage on the enemy. They claimed 26 of the raiders in all, over half of them Il-2s. The *Kommandeur* himself, Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler, led the field. His four successes – two Il-2s and two P-40s – took him to 120 (and edged him ahead of Theo Weissenberger, who would not get his first kill on the main eastern front until the end of January 1944). Four of the *Gruppe*'s established aces were credited with doubles, namely Oberfeldwebel Jakob Norz and Feldwebel Arthur Beth with a brace of Il-2s apiece (raising their scores to 45 and 17, respectively) and Leutnant Franz Dörr and Hauptmann Hans-Hermann Schmidt with an Il-2 and a P-40 to bring their tallies to seven each.

The action also resulted in the emergence of two new aces, both from 7. *Staffel*. Leutnant Karl-Heinrich Vögel's fifth was an Il-2, but just to

In November 1943 Hauptmann Horst Carganico's II./JG 5 was transferred from the Arctic down to the main eastern front. Prominent in the foreground of this photograph of 7. *Staffel*'s *Gustavs* on an airfield in the Nevel sector – probably Idritsa – is another of the *Gruppenkommandeur*'s unmistakable 'Micky-Maus' aircraft. One wonders what the local brass made of such individualism – presumably not a lot, for it is reported that 'Micky' was soon replaced by a regulation set of chevrons





As the third winter of the war in the Arctic tightened its grip on Petsamo, the servicing and refuelling of III. *Gruppe*'s machines out in the open posed ever greater problems . . .

make sure of his new-found status he despatched a P-40 only seconds later and then added a Hurricane 15 minutes after that. It was an Il-2 that also provided Feldwebel Kurt Drössler with his fifth, while another P-40 was the first success for future ace Leutnant Werner Gayko.

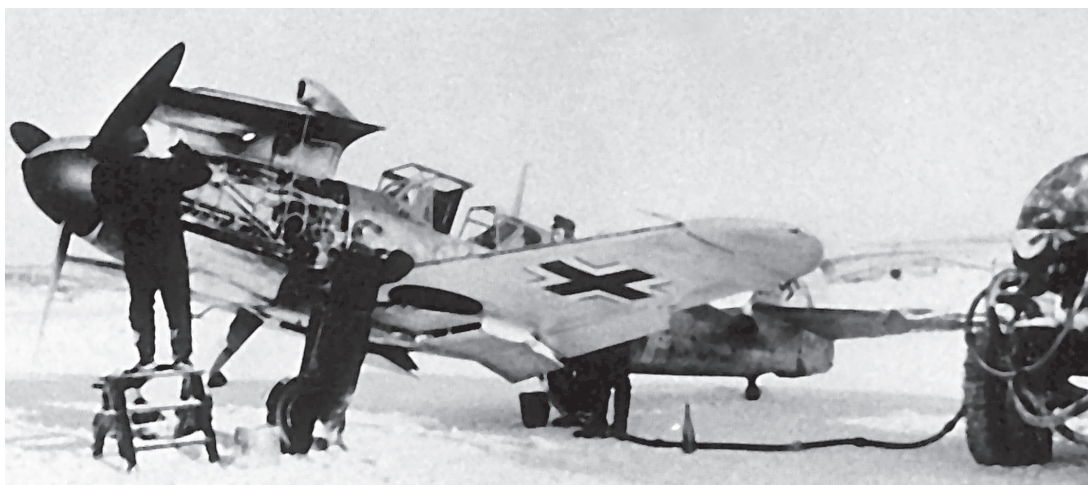
The air battle around Petsamo, which lasted all of 25 minutes, proved a fitting finale for III./JG 5's second year in the Arctic. Not only had its pilots destroyed a host of enemy aircraft without loss to themselves, the engagement was also deemed worthy of special mention in the OKW's (High Command of the Armed Forces') daily bulletin;

'On the Arctic Ocean front German fighter pilots and flak batteries of the Luftwaffe repulsed an attack by the enemy air force on a major air base and destroyed 32 of the 65 attacking Soviet aircraft.'

Furthermore, it was calculated that numbered among the 26 machines brought down by Ehrler's pilots was not only the 600th collective victory for III. *Gruppe*, but also the 250th for 8. *Staffel* and the 200th for 7. *Staffel*!

With the Arctic region now in the vice-like grip of midwinter, the rest of the year was very much an anti-climax. On 2 December 9. *Staffel*'s Leutnant Günther Eichhorn, who had gained his seventh, and final, victory during the Petsamo battle a week earlier – reportedly by ramming a P-40 – was himself shot down by Russian flak and taken into captivity. On the plus side, Hauptmann Ehrler's III./JG 5 managed to notch up four kills in December.

. . . so every minute of clear, if freezingly cold, weather was utilised to the full





CHAPTER FOUR

1944 – WITHDRAWAL, NOT DEFEAT

The New Year did not get off to a very auspicious start. True, III./JG 5 logged nine victories in January – more than double the previous month's total – but these successes were to cost the *Gruppe* six of its own pilots killed or captured. The first two casualties were suffered on 3 January when a *Schwarm* of Bf 109s encountered four Soviet Yaks to the southwest of Murmansk. Despite the equal odds, it was the Germans who fared worse on this occasion – one Yak destroyed for the loss of two of 7. *Staffel*'s pilots. Seventeen-victory ace Feldwebel Arthur Beth was forced to land deep inside enemy territory and quickly captured. His wingman was killed.

Just over a week later, on 11 January, 9./JG 5 lost its *Staffelkapitän* when Hauptmann Hans-Hermann Schmidt's machine was hit by flak over the Rybachiy Peninsula. The ex-*Zerstörer* pilot survived a crash-landing and managed to make it on foot to the south coast of the peninsula, only to be picked up by Soviet forces two days later while searching for a boat to get him across the four-mile width of Motovskiy Bay to the mainland.

On 16 January two more pilots of 7./JG 5 failed to return from the Murmansk area. Leutnant Karl-Heinrich Vögel (another seven-victory ace)

January 1944 brought the *Zerstörerstaffel*'s 30-month Arctic war against the Soviets to a close. During that time the unit had undergone three redesignations, claimed some 120 enemy aircraft destroyed and lost at least 40 of its own crew members killed, captured or missing

and Gefreiter Horst Bergmann were performance listed as 'missing in action'. Only years later was it learned that Vögel had been shot while trying to escape from a Soviet PoW camp.

16 January also saw the last two kills scored by the *Zerstörer* on the Arctic front. Eight days earlier a detachment of 13.(Z)/JG 5 machines had been transferred down from Kirkenes to carry out operations against the Murmansk–Moscow railway line. And it was the leader of this small *Kommando*, Leutnant Helmut Ziegenhagen, who closed the chapter on the *Zerstörerstaffel*'s Arctic odyssey by claiming the second of 16 January's two victories. The LaGG-3 was Ziegenhagen's fourth recorded eastern front kill. He would not get the chance to make it five, for a signal had already been received in Kirkenes ordering 13.(Z)/JG 5's deployment to the west coast of Norway.

The move began on 25 January when the *Zerstörer* staged from Kirkenes to Bardufoss on the first leg of their long flight down to Stavanger. The unit's history was thus about to turn full circle. Having begun its career as 1.(Z)/JG 77 by downing a handful of RAF Blenheims and Hudsons off southwest Norway in early 1941, the unit would end it as 13.(Z)/JG 5 by claiming a clutch of RAF Beaufighters and Liberators in the same area during the remaining months of 1944.

In January a small detachment of III. *Gruppe* Bf 109s was also stationed down along the Murmansk–Moscow railway line sector. It was responsible for four of the month's nine kills, the Il-2 and Yak-7 shot down on 17 January both being credited to the *Kommandoführer*, Leutnant Hans-Bruno Diepen of 8. *Staffel*.

A protracted spell of particularly bad weather then brought virtually all flying to a halt, and it was not until 29 January that the Alakurtti detachment's other two victories were recorded. These, a P-40 and a LaGG-3, were both claimed by 9. *Staffel*'s Leutnant Horst Stephan, taking his total to six and qualifying him as an ace.

At the same time the bulk of III. *Gruppe* up at Petsamo were mounting their first operation of the new year by sending all available machines on a sweep of the Murmansk area. They encountered a gaggle of 12 or so Yak-7s south of the airfield at Murmashi and despatched four of them in a 'wild ten-minute dogfight'. Two were claimed by Oberfeldwebel Walter Schuck and a third was credited to *Gruppenkommandeur* Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler. But there had been a price to pay. Leutnant Klaus Walter, who had taken over as *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 5 after the loss of Hauptmann Hans-Hermann Schmidt earlier in the month, failed to return. His machine was targeted by several of the Yaks, and it is likely that Walter was killed in their concerted crossfire for he made no attempt to bail out as his 'Yellow 4' went into a rear vertical spin streaming glycol. After just 18 days in office, Leutnant Klaus Walter was in turn replaced at the head of 9. *Staffel* by Leutnant Wolfgang Rost.

United in their very remoteness, the Arctic's air and ground forces forged strong bonds, both operationally and socially. One visit to III./JG 5's Petsamo base by a group of *Gebirgsjäger* early in 1944 was the occasion for a whole series of photographs. This particular shot shows four pilots – with 8. *Staffel*'s Oberfeldwebel Jakob Norz in the driving seat – about to go for a ride on one of the mountain troops' reindeer-drawn sledges



February was to witness a slight improvement in III./JG 5's fortunes in that it managed to achieve 11 victories, and at a lower cost of just three losses. The first two kills of the month – a P-40 on 6 February and another ten days later – were both claimed by Leutnant Hans-Bruno Diepen, commander of the Alakurtti detachment.

Also operating along the Murmansk–Moscow railway line sector at this time were the Fw 190s of Hauptmann Strakeljahn's 14.(*Jabo*)/JG 5. At the end of 1943 this unit had been moved south from the near constant darkness of Petsamo to Alakurtti, where the daylight lasted two hours longer. After some weeks spent attacking trains, stations and other rail installations on an almost daily basis, the *Staffel* finally left the *Geschwader* fold on 19 February when it was transferred to the *Schlacht* (ground attack) arm under its new designation of 4./SG 5.

To compensate for the loss of the *Jabostaffel*, the pilots of III./JG 5 at Petsamo had already been honing their fighter-bomber skills by dropping 250 kg cement practice bombs. This proved to be a timely measure, for on 20 February the *Gruppe* received a frantic call for help from the mountain troops holding the defensive line directly in front of the airfield. A strong force of some 600 partisans had already broken through their positions and were advancing on Petsamo. The Bf 109s played no small part in helping to repulse the Soviets, who finally scattered and fled after practically two whole days (in terms of the Arctic in February, more like eight hours!) of almost continuous bombing and strafing.

Nevertheless, the *Gruppe*'s main opponents were, and would remain, the enemy in the air. On the afternoon of 21 February, even as the last of the partisans were falling back from Petsamo in disarray, two machines of 8. *Staffel* took off on a low-level reconnaissance sweep of the Murmansk region. Nor did they return empty-handed. West of the target area they claimed a trio of Airacobras – two for Oberfeldwebel Jakob 'Jockl' Norz and one (the all-important 'fifth') for Leutnant Bernhard von Hermann. Seventy-two hours later another three Airacobras were added to the *Gruppe*'s scoreboard, all falling to experienced Oberfeldwebeln. The pair claimed by 7. *Staffel*'s Helmut Klante took him to a total of 22, while the one downed over Lake Zog was victory number eight for Rudolf Linz of 8./JG 5.

Then, on 29 February, the same 8. *Staffel* duo of 'Jockl' Norz and Bernhard von Hermann, who had accounted for the three Airacobras west of Murmansk eight days earlier, repeated the performance by despatching a trio of Yak-7s during a ten-minute dogfight in the same area. This gave Leutnant von Hermann his sixth, while the second of Oberfeldwebel Norz's pair left him just one short of his half-century.

But for 9./JG 5 the month ended on a more sombre note with the loss of its *Staffelkapitän*, Leutnant Wolfgang Rost, also during that day's mission to Murmansk. Rost's wingman on this occasion was a young and still relatively inexperienced Gefreiter who, in the heat of the dogfight, misjudged his distance as he attempted to stick close to his leader during



It was not long after the *Gebirgsjägers'* visit that 'Jockl' Norz claimed his half-century – an Il-2 brought down on 5 March 1944. And exactly three weeks after that he received the Knight's Cross for his then total of 57. He is seen here describing one of the victories that contributed to his winning the award

a steep turn. According to another pilot, the number two's propeller 'sawed the end off Leutnant Rost's fuselage'. Fortunately, Rost managed to bail out of his stricken machine, but his capture by the Russians meant that 9./JG 5 had lost its third *Staffelkapitän* in little more than six weeks. The man appointed to head the *Staffel* in his place, Oberleutnant Lorenz Andresen, was to last the best part of five months.

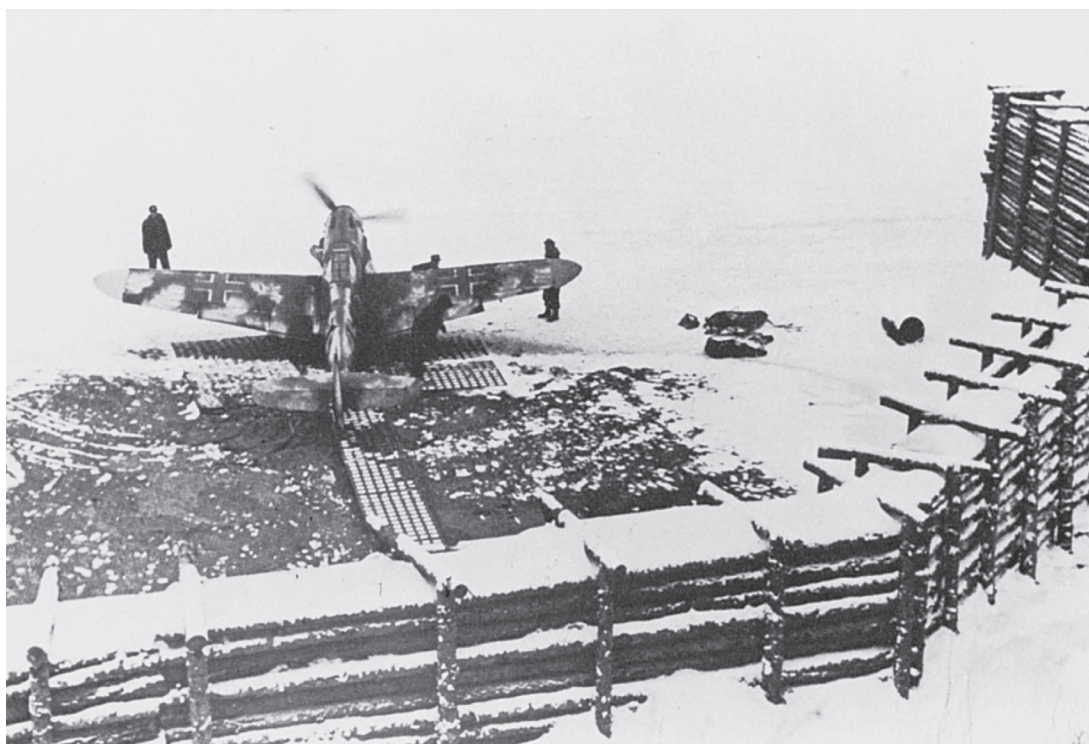
Despite his damaged propeller, Rost's wingman, Gefreiter Rudolf Artner, was able to get his aircraft safely back to Petsamo, where he subsequently became not only a valued and dependable wingman to the likes of Heinrich Ehrler and Walter Schuck, but also an ace in his own right.

The month of March was to witness a significant rise in JG 5's rate of scoring in the Arctic, as these figures show – nine victories in January, 11 victories in February and 89 victories(!) in March. There were three main reasons for this near tenfold increase – the lengthening hours of daylight, the growing strength and belligerency of a poorly trained enemy and, not least, the return to the Arctic theatre of II. *Gruppe*.

Things started quietly enough, with three kills being claimed by 8. *Staffel* during a convoy escort mission on 3 March. But this modest success was more than offset during the course of a similar operation by the same *Staffel* 48 hours later when Oberfeldwebel Jakob Norz and his wingman were shot down by Russian fighters off the mouth of Varanger Fjord. 'Jockl' Norz just managed to make it back to the shore, where he wrote off his *Gustav* in a spectacular crash-landing. Emerging from the wreckage unhurt, he was quickly picked up by a Storch. Norz's wingman was not so lucky.

On 8 March 8./JG 5 suffered another fatality when Leutnant Hans-Bruno Diepen's machine crashed while attacking a coastal battery near the

A Bf 109G of JG 5 has its engine run up within the fighter's well-constructed blast pen on an airfield in Finland in early 1944. Note the pierced steel planking laid down to provide a hard surface when the ground thawed in the spring (via Eddie Nielinger)



northern tip of the Rybachiy Peninsula. References differ as to whether he was brought down by enemy flak or whether, blinded by the glare of sun on snow, he simply flew into the ground. Whatever the actual cause, the 13-victory Diepen was extricated from the wreckage of his fighter by Soviet troops but reportedly succumbed to his injuries later than same day.

8. *Staffel* was out on convoy protection duties again on 13 March, led this time by the *Gruppenkommandeur*. And it was Hauptmann Ehrler who claimed three of the day's seven kills, with 'Jockl' Norz being credited with two of the other four.

By now II./JG 5 had arrived back at Alakurtti after its four months' stint down on the eastern front proper. As might have been expected, it was the experienced Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger and his regular wingman, Feldwebel August Mors, who achieved the first victories, each of them being credited with a Yak-9 on 16 March. Twenty-four hours later they downed another five Yak-9s, Weissenberger's trio taking him to 144 and Mors' pair bringing him up to 27.

However, it was in the far north that the main action took place on this 17 March. Shortly after 0945 hrs every available III. *Gruppe* machine had been scrambled in response to a report that a large formation of enemy aircraft was approaching an inbound convoy. And by the end of the day, which saw two major actions fought in defence of the merchantmen, the pilots of III./JG 5 had accounted for 32 of the attackers.

This was just the first of a number of highly successful days that were enjoyed by III. *Gruppe* at intervals throughout the late spring and early summer, and which were to culminate exactly three months hence with the unit being credited with a staggering 65(!) enemy aircraft destroyed. Three of the reasons for III./JG 5's ever increasing rate of kills have already been mentioned. Now, perhaps, a fourth should be added – the Soviet higher echelons' profligacy with the men and machines they commanded. Their tactics relied almost entirely upon weight of numbers. In their attempts to swamp the now numerically far inferior Arctic Luftwaffe, they threw wave after wave of bombers and fighters into the battle for supremacy with almost total disregard for the losses being suffered.

And it was primarily the pilots of JG 5 who were inflicting those losses and reaping the benefits of the Russians' stubborn adherence to the same costly tactics. The personal scores of many members of III. *Gruppe* began to soar, while those of the *Experten* rocketed to heights previously unimagined. Given the numbers of kills involved, it is not possible to itemise every individual action. But the salient milestones in the various aces' careers are recorded, if known, as are the more significant of the losses.

During the convoy battles of 17 March, for example, more than half of the 32 victories claimed went to the *Gruppe's* three leading scorers. The *Kommandeur* himself, Hauptmann Ehrler, was credited with seven, taking him up to 131. The recently promoted Fahnenjunker-Oberfeldwebel (Officer-Candidate Flight Sergeant) Walter Schuck also got seven and Oberfeldwebel 'Jockl' Norz accounted for five, which brought their scores to 72 and 57, respectively. Further down the 'batting order', Oberleutnant Hans Berger's trio of fighters raised his tally to 17, while a brace of Yaks saw Leutnant Bernhard von Hermann reach double figures. Unteroffizier Hermann Amend despatched a Boston for his fifth and two other

Unteroffiziere and future aces – Friedrich Brunner and Heinrich-Friedrich ‘Heinfried’ Wiegand – claimed their first.

The day had cost III./JG 5 just one combat casualty. Recently appointed *Gruppen-Adjutant* Leutnant Bernhard von Hermann had been among the pilots ordered to patrol off the northwestern tip of the Rybachiy Peninsula to intercept the Soviet formations returning back across the bay after attacking the convoy off Vardø. They did not have long to wait. As more and more enemy machines began streaming back, a series of violent dogfights developed. But after claiming his two Yak-9s, Leutnant von Hermann’s own aircraft was hit in the engine. Dragging a long banner of black smoke he tried to make it down to the mouth of Petsamo Fjord but was forced to ditch when less than a mile from land. He managed to clamber into his dinghy before the machine sank beneath him. Several attempts were made to rescue him by boat, but all were driven off by fire from Soviet shore batteries. And it was the Russians who finally picked him up and took him into captivity.

On 20 March it was the turn of II. *Gruppe* to inflict some serious losses on the enemy. In their first major confrontation since returning from the main eastern front, the pilots of II./JG 5 at Alakurtti were credited with 23 Soviet aircraft destroyed, the majority of them Il-2s. And, just like III. *Gruppe* three days earlier, it was the unit’s established *Experten* who gained the lion’s share of the victories, although on this occasion Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger’s four (three Il-2s and a P-40) was somewhat overshadowed by Feldwebel August Mors’ eight (six Il-2s and a pair of P-40s).

Oberleutnant Weissenberger was able to turn the tables on his wingman on 25 March, however, when they accounted for eight Yak-9s between them. Moreover, the second of his five victories on this day took the *Staffelkapitän*’s overall score to 150.

But up in Petsamo 24 hours later it was 8./JG 5’s Oberfeldwebel Jakob ‘Jockl’ Norz who was the centre of attention when he was awarded the Knight’s Cross for his 57 victories.

April opened with a pair of P-40s for Officer-Candidate Walter Schuck. These took him neatly to 75, but he promptly added a trio of Yak-9s the following day. ‘Jockl’ Norz was also credited with three Yak-9s on 2 April, while Oberleutnants Horst Berger and Franz Dörr, the *Kapitäne* of 7. and 8. *Staffeln*, each got two kills – P-40s and Yak-9s, respectively. Down in the Alakurtti sector 4./JG 5 claimed six Il-2s, three of them falling to

The pilots of JG 5 accounted for a great many Soviet Il-2 ground attack aircraft. This particular specimen (‘Yellow 21’?) was claimed by Oberleutnant Günther Schwanecke, now the *Staffelkapitän* of 4./JG 5, and was probably one of the trio he brought down on 2 April 1944 during II. *Gruppe*’s brief return to Finland



Oberleutnant Günther Schwanecke (and constituting the last of his five recorded Arctic victories).

During the next week the *Experten* of both *Gruppen* continued to add to their scores. Walter Schuck's haul on 7 April comprised three P-40s, a pair of Airacobras and an Il-2. These took his total to 84, thus earning him a long overdue Knight's Cross. Schuck famously learned of the award when called to the phone while watching a film show that same evening. A second Knight's Cross for the *Gruppe* in less than

a fortnight clearly merited celebration, and the festivities went on late into the night. Consequently, when the order came through to make the 75-minute flight down to Ponsalenjoki the following afternoon, most of the pilots were still nursing monumental hangovers – reportedly, one even had to be lifted bodily from his cockpit on arrival!

Nor had their condition improved much by the time they paraded in front of General der Flieger Julius Schulz, the AOC Luftwaffe Forces *Feldluftgau* (Forward Air District) Finland, who had flown in from Rovaniemi to make the presentation. Very charitably, the visitor put the pilots' tired, unshaven and generally unkempt appearance down to the rigours of recent operations. And he must have thought the diminutive Schuck the most deserving case of all, for he promptly offered him a lift in his Ju 52/3m back to Rovaniemi, from where the Arctic's latest Knight's Cross winner was sent on special home leave.

Meanwhile, it had been business as usual at Alakurtti. On the morning of 9 April II./JG 5 had flown escort to a formation of Ju 87s setting out to attack a station on the Murmansk–Moscow railway line. When 12 or so Yak-9s challenged the German force, the Bf 109s downed seven of them, with Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger alone claiming four.

12 April proved a busy day for both *Gruppen*. At Alakurtti II./JG 5 was continuing with its Stuka escort missions that netted its pilots five Yak-9s (including two each for the Weissenberger/Mors duo). In the far north III./JG 5 had its hands full fending off enemy attacks on Petsamo airfield. Among the 12 victories claimed while doing so were a pair of Yak-9s for *Gruppenkommandeur* Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler, while Oberleutnants Franz Dörr and Horst Berger got one apiece (a Yak-9 and an Airacobra, respectively). But it was two less familiar names, Unteroffizier Peter Rohde and Fähnrich (Officer-Cadet) Hans Vollet, who took the day's honours by being credited with three victories each, and thereby joining the ranks of 7. *Staffel*'s aces.

On 13 April Feldwebel August Mors accounted for a trio of Yak-9s during yet another of II./JG 5's Stuka escort operations. Oberleutnant Theo Weissenberger then added a single Yak to his score on 15 April. It was on this latter date that the first detachments of the *Gruppe* left Alakurtti to fly back down to Idritsa on the eastern front.



Every successful *Staffel* had a core of dependable and experienced NCO pilots. In the foreground is 'Black 9', the machine of 8./JG 5's Oberfeldwebel Josef Kunz (14 Arctic victories), whilst behind it is 'Black 5' of Oberfeldwebel Heinz Beyer (27 Arctic victories)

Theo Weissenberger was to claim another Yak (his final Arctic kill) 24 hours later – the day he was officially appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 5. He had been leading the *Gruppe* in an acting capacity since the end of March when Hauptmann Horst Carganico had been posted back to Germany to take command of I./JG 5, which was now engaged in Defence of the Reich operations. Then, on 17 April, the last elements of II. *Gruppe* took off from Alakurtti, and this time it would not be coming back.

The earlier transfer of the *Zerstörerstaffel* to Norway, the re-designation of the *Jabostaffel* and now the departure of II. *Gruppe* meant that Major Ehrler's Petsamo-based III./JG 5 was the sole remaining part of the *Geschwader* in the far north and, as such, alone responsible for opposing the growing might of Soviet air power as the campaign in the Arctic theatre entered its final phase. One of the first things Ehrler was called upon to do was to send a small detachment back down to Alakurtti to provide continued fighter protection (albeit on a much reduced scale) to the Stukas operating against the Murmansk–Moscow railway line. But it was another convoy escort operation in the far north that would lead to the last major clashes of the month.

These occurred on 23 April as an outbound convoy was making its way up the east coast of the Varanger Peninsula, and would net the *Gruppe* a total of 38 enemy aircraft destroyed. The action began shortly before 1030 hrs when the vessels were just south of Vardø. And for the next 25 minutes the Bf 109s on station above the convoy, speedily reinforced by other fighters scrambled from Petsamo, fought hard to keep the attackers at bay. By the time the last of the enemy retired they had lost 27 of their number. Heading the list of claimants were Hauptmann Ehrler and Oberleutnant Horst Berger with four apiece. Close behind with three each came Oberleutnant Franz Dörr, Oberfeldwebeln Josef 'Jupp' Kunz and Helmut Kischnick and Unteroffizier Peter Rohde. The latter's trio took his score to ten, but would prove to be his last. Shortly after his final victim (a P-40) went down, Unteroffizier Rohde was himself shot into the sea off Vardø.

Among the pilots claiming their first kills during this initial melee were Feldwebel Heinz Arnold and Gefreiter Rudolf Artner, both of whom would rise to become aces during the *Gruppe*'s last six months in the Arctic.

Some four hours after their opening strike the enemy attacked the convoy again, only to sacrifice another 11 aircraft. Eight fell to pilots who had already scored during the earlier action. Oberleutnant Horst Berger added two more victories to the four he had claimed in the morning to make it six for the day. Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Linz, who had claimed a single Airacobra off Vardø, now got four more of the same type further along the coast to the northeast of Berlevaag. Also ending the day with five was Oberfeldwebel 'Jupp' Kunz, who downed two Airacobras off Berlevaag to add to his earlier trio of P-40s.

There now followed a prolonged spell of very wet weather. Conditions became so bad at Petsamo, in fact, that the *Gruppe* was forced to move across to a less waterlogged Salmijärvi. Not a single kill was recorded during the first nine days of May, while 8. *Staffel* suffered a serious loss when its *Kapitän*, Oberleutnant Horst Berger, failed to return from a solo sortie in the early hours of 8 May.

According to intelligence, the Soviets had extended the runway at one of their airfields on the Rybachiy Peninsula in order to allow it to handle four-engined aircraft, and machines of this type were regularly using the base as a staging stop. It would appear that Horst Berger, whose last victories had been the five fighters and single Il-2 that he had brought down during the convoy battles of 23 April, saw this as an opportunity to add something far larger to his bag, for shortly after midnight he took off alone and headed northeast. His *Staffel* never saw him again, and he was officially posted missing. Much later, however, it was reported that an aircraft had been observed going down in flames into the sea to the north of the peninsula. Berger's place at the head of 8./JG 5 was taken by four-victory Oberleutnant Rudolf Glöckner, previously the adjutant of II. *Gruppe*.

It was not until 10 May that III./JG 5 claimed its first victories of the month, with Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Linz being credited with three of that day's seven successes. Twenty-four hours later the unit doubled that figure to 14, the bulk of which were shared between three pilots – two for Rudolf Linz this time, three for Feldwebel Heinz Arnold (which made him an ace) and five for Major Heinrich Ehrler.

On the afternoon of 16 May nearly all of the *Gruppe's* serviceable fighters were ordered up to Svartnes, on the Varanger Peninsula, in expectation of enemy air strikes on an important convoy in the area. It was a wise move, as the Soviets attacked in two separate waves – the first at around 1900 hrs, followed by a second some three hours later. Altogether they lost 21 of their aircraft to III./JG 5. Top scorer of the day was 7. *Staffel's* Oberleutnant Franz Dörr, who downed an Il-2 and a pair of Airacobras in the first attack, plus another Il-2, a single Airacobra and a brace of Bostons in the second. Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Linz of 8./JG 5 was credited with two Il-2s from the first wave, together with a pair of P-40s and an Airacobra from the follow-up attack. *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Ehrler's four victories –

Something of a mystery surrounds the loss of Oberleutnant Horst Berger, the 26-victory *Kapitän* of 8. *Staffel*, who disappeared after taking off alone from Salmijärvi in the early hours of 8 May 1944





A cigarette break for four centurions who would amass a total of 568 Arctic victories between them. They are, from the left, Walter Schuck, Franz Dörr, Heinrich Ehrler and Jakob Norz

three Airacobras and an Il-2 – were all claimed during the course of the second strike.

But perhaps the most notable success of the day was that achieved by relative tyro Leutnant Werner Gayko of 7./JG 5. The reconnaissance Spitfire he brought down at 1918 hrs was only the third kill of his career to date.

Incredibly, the month's remaining 71 victories were all then scored within the space of little more than three-quarters of an hour! And, once again, the engagement was fought in defence of a convoy. This time, however, it involved not two waves of attacking aircraft, but two separate actions comprising seven waves in all. The first three waves – estimated at some 80 enemy aircraft – opened the attack shortly after 2130 hrs on the evening of 25 May as the inbound convoy was passing Berlevaag. It lasted just 21 furious minutes and cost the Soviets 33 machines.

Battle was then rejoined at exactly 0454 hrs the following morning, by which time the vessels were nearing Vardø. It consisted of four waves totalling approximately 100 attackers, lasted all of 26 minutes and resulted in the enemy losing a further 38 aircraft.

The same precautionary measure as before had been taken, with the bulk of III./JG 5 again being deployed up to Svartnes, the small landing ground near Vardø. From here they were ideally placed to intercept the enemy formations making for the approaching convoy. And they employed this advantage to the full. More than 12 pilots scored multiple victories, and their names read like a roll-call of the *Gruppe's* aces. At the top of the list with ten victories each by the close of the two actions were Fahnenjunker-Oberfeldwebel Walter Schuck and Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Linz. Schuck's victims were a mixed bag of bombers and fighters, predominantly P-40s, whereas all but one of Linz's kills were Boston bombers and torpedo-bombers.

Close behind this leading pair came *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Heinrich Ehrler and the *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 5, Oberleutnant Franz Dörr, with nine apiece. In amassing their nine victories both had reached major milestones in their combat careers. The last of Ehrler's four kills on the evening of 25 May – a P-40 downed north-northwest of Berlevaag – had taken his total to 150. And the first of Dörr's five victims early on the morning of 26 May – a Boston shot into the sea northwest of Vardø – had been his 50th.

Further down the scale, the twin actions of 25 and 26 May saw Feldwebel Heinz Arnold, Unteroffizier Rudolf Artner, Oberleutnant Rudolf Glöckner and Oberfeldwebel August Lübking all achieve their fifth to become Arctic aces, while Unteroffizier Heinz Lork and Gefreiter Josef Suska had each got a foot on the scoring ladder by claiming their first.

There may have been ample cause for celebration at Petsamo, but on 27 May came the news that Major Horst Carganico, one of the Arctic's early *Experten* and now the *Kommandeur* of I. Gruppe, had been killed



A war correspondent interviews Oberfeldwebel Walter Schuck immediately upon his return to Petsamo after the evening mission of 15 June 1944 that saw him achieve his century (number 100 being the third of the four P-40s he had just downed in as many minutes)

in action against B-17 bombers while flying in Defence of the Reich operations. Carganico's loss was indicative of the intensity of the USAAF's daylight bombing campaign against Germany. Such was the pressure that Luftwaffe fighter units were being withdrawn from all the other fighting fronts to bolster the Homeland's aerial defences. One of those recalled was Oberleutnant Lorenz Andresen's 9./JG 5, which departed the far north on 1 June for incorporation into II./JG 5 as part of the Defence of the Reich command.

Several pilots had been excluded from the transfer, however, and these now formed the nucleus for a replacement *Staffel* at Petsamo. Led by Leutnant Werner Gayko, this was initially designated the *Kommandostaffel* III./JG 5, but it was soon renamed the *Eismeerstaffel* (Arctic Ocean Squadron). And it was the new *Staffel* that claimed the first victory of what was to be the most successful month in III./JG 5's history when Feldwebel 'Heinfried' Wiegand attained Arctic acedom by downing an Il-2 intruder northwest of Petsamo shortly before midnight on 5 June. Forty-eight hours later, 8. *Staffel*'s Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Linz was credited with a trio of Airacobras. And among 12 June's three kills was another Airacobra, which provided Leutnant Werner Gayko with his fifth.

After this somewhat modest start, the *Gruppe*'s scoring rate began to pick up in mid-month, with 18 victories being claimed on 15 June – nine of them in the early hours of the morning while shepherding a convoy into Petsamo Bay, and another nine following an emergency scramble later that same evening.

Fahnenjunker-Oberfeldwebel Walter Schuck (like Gayko and Wiegand, a member of the original 9./JG 5 and now part of the *Eismeerstaffel*) accounted for a third of the day's kills. His successes – all P-40s, two in the morning and four in the evening – took his total to 101 and made him the Luftwaffe's third Arctic centurion.

Exactly 100 behind Walter Schuck came Oberfeldwebel Josef Baldes, whose single P-40 on the evening of that 15 June was the first victory of a career that is still shrouded in some mystery. A long-range reconnaissance pilot in the Arctic theatre before volunteering for single-engined fighters, Baldes is on record as being credited with four more kills before the end of June 1944. But after that, nothing. Except, that is, for one brief reference stating that Josef Baldes was awarded the Knight's Cross on 9 May 1945 – the day *after* Germany officially surrendered! – and which, if true, begs

the question what did he do in those last ten months of the war to merit such a prestigious decoration?

A more familiar name contributing to 15 June's 18 victories was Oberleutnant Franz Dörr, who claimed four, while Oberfeldwebeln Heinz Arnold and August Lübking got two each, bringing them both into double figures. But the day, successful as it had been, was just a foretaste of what was to come 48 hours later.

Saturday, 17 June 1944 was to be the most momentous day in III./JG 5's entire three-year history. Like many other days in the recent past, the action on this date was fought in defence of a coastal convoy. What set 17 June apart, however, were the sheer number of enemy aircraft involved. It is estimated that the Russians sent well in excess of 200 aeroplanes against the vessels, and by the day's end III. *Gruppe* had accounted for 65 of them!

The first shots of the battle were fired by Walter Schuck at exactly 0743 hrs;

'We were suddenly confronted by the largest formation of Russian aircraft we had ever seen. Heading towards our Messerschmitts at an altitude of 1000 metres was an absolute armada of well over a hundred *Shturmoviks*, Bostons, Kittyhawks and Airacobras. We engaged the leading Kittyhawks to the east of Vardø and within a few minutes I had downed two of them.

'As more and more Me 109s came rushing to our assistance, Gayko, Linz and I turned our attention to the *Shturmoviks*, which were closing in on the convoy at low level. The first Il-2 was torn to shreds by the bursts of fire from Rudi Linz's cannon.'

And so it went on for the next half-hour, with enemy aircraft being shot into the sea at the rate of more than one a minute. By the time the last of them – a Boston claimed by Walter Schuck to the southeast of Vardø at 0814 hrs – had disappeared beneath the waves, 34 Soviet machines had been destroyed.

Nor did it stop there. True to form, the Russians reappeared that evening to target Kirkenes, the convoy's port of destination, only to suffer another savage mauling – 31 aircraft downed in just 27 minutes. The day's combined total of 65 enemy aircraft destroyed was the highest number ever achieved by III./JG 5. Significantly perhaps, all but three of the claimants were already established aces. And just five of the *Gruppe*'s foremost *Experten* had alone been responsible for more than two-thirds of the victories won.

After downing his first two P-40s, centurion Walter Schuck proceeded to claim five more kills during the clash off Vardø, and then added a further four during the evening raid on Kirkenes. Coming next were Oberfeldwebel Heinz Arnold and Unteroffizier Rudolf Linz with nine each, also spread over the day's two actions. And just behind them were Oberleutnant Franz Dörr and Oberfähnrich Helmut Neumann, the latter clearly fully recovered from his serious neck wound of 26 September last, whose eight apiece were equally divided between morning and evening engagements.

Further down the scoring scale, Oberfähnrich Hans Vollet's four – two P-39s off Vardø and two P-40s over Kirkenes – had taken him into double figures. But they were to be his last Arctic victories, for after downing his

second Kittyhawk, Vollet was himself wounded and forced to bail out of his badly damaged 'White 5'. He was the *Gruppe's* only casualty of the day.

As a postscript to all the frenzied activity of 17 June, the single kill early the next morning might have been regarded as something of an anti-climax. That was far from the case, however, as the victim was a high-flying reconnaissance Spitfire sent to photograph the damage inflicted on Kirkenes. The *Eismeerstaffel's* Walter Schuck was scrambled to catch the snooper. Flying as wingman to Schuck was his less experienced *Staffelkapitän*, Leutnant Werner Gayko, who had downed just one P-40 the previous day. The pair climbed to an altitude of 9000 metres before setting off in pursuit of the unsuspecting enemy. Gradually sacrificing height to build up speed, the lengthy chase ended northwest of Murmansk at 0510 hrs with Schuck closing in to within 30 metres of the Spitfire's tail and sending it spiralling down from 7500 metres.

Back at Petsamo, Walter Schuck was able to claim a *Geschwader* record of '12-in-one-day' (more accurately perhaps 12 within the space of 24 hours), a feat that earned him a congratulatory telephone call and a crate of champagne from the AOC Air Fleet 5, General der Flieger Josef Kammhuber.

The next nine days passed relatively quietly, with only four kills on record – three of them being a trio of P-40s caught by 8. *Staffel's* Oberfeldwebel Ernst Schulze off the Varanger Peninsula in the early hours of 23 June. Action flared up again four days later, however, when on the afternoon of 27 June the enemy mounted another heavy raid on Kirkenes. Four waves of bombers, each with a strong fighter escort – some 120 aircraft in all – attacked the harbour installations, only to lose nearly a quarter of their number to III./JG 5's fighters.

In all, eight Bostons and 19 of their escorting fighters were brought down. Leutnant 'Jockl' Norz did the most damage, being credited with three of the bombers and a pair of Yak-9s. Among the other claimants, Walter Schuck and Franz Dörr each got four.

Shortly before midnight the raiders returned to Kirkenes. This time they forfeited 23 machines, the majority of them fighters. The same trio of *Experten* repeated their earlier performance, with Jakob Norz again claiming five (all Airacobras) while Walter Schuck and Franz Dörr shared another eight equally between them. 'Jockl' Norz's last Airacobra had gone down at 0020 hrs. And although there were several more individual victories during the later course of that 28 June – including a trio of fighters for Walter Schuck in the Murmansk region – the two raids on Kirkenes marked the last of the month's major air battles.

They also set the pattern for III./JG 5's final 16 weeks in the Arctic. In the beginning, Murmansk and its surrounding airfields had been the main focal point of the *Gruppe's* activities. But Schuck's recent foray to the area was, by this time, very much the exception rather than the rule. The tide of war had turned irrevocably in favour of the Soviets. III./JG 5's stance was now almost wholly defensive. This did have its advantages, however. The *Gruppe's* pilots no longer experienced that *frisson* of apprehension that came with crossing the frontline into enemy territory. The fear of Soviet captivity, or worse, had been largely removed. And they no longer had to seek out the enemy. The enemy was coming to them, in ever increasing numbers.

As Soviet pressure increased, so too did the number of *Alarmstarts*, or emergency scrambles, the pilots of III./JG 5 were called upon to make in response. But there is something decidedly odd about this one. Note the grins on the faces of those (including *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Heinrich Ehrler, second left) dashing from the dispersal hut, and the relaxed attitude of the airman lurking in the background – could this by any chance be a ‘scramble’ staged purely for the benefit of a war photographer?



The *Gruppe* would continue to inflict losses on the Soviets, but the days of spectacular scores were a thing of the past. Such days were becoming fewer and further between, the number of victories being achieved was declining, and, inevitably, given the growing might of the enemy, the *Gruppe* was to suffer some serious losses of its own.

Kirkenes was subjected to its next heavy raid in the early evening of 4 July. And, once again, III./JG 5's fighters were on hand to exact a toll. They claimed 26 of the enemy destroyed, nearly half of them Boston bombers. On this occasion 'Jockl' Norz had to share top honours with Franz Dörr, both being credited with five. These successes – five Yak-9s for Norz and three fighters and a pair of Bostons for Dörr – took the two *Experten's* overall scores to 78 and 83, respectively. Walter Schuck managed just three (two Bostons and an Airacobra), while Unteroffizier Rudolf Artner's single Boston brought him up into double figures.

On 9 July 'Jockl' Norz was credited with four of the six P-40s downed by 8. *Staffel*. His tally thus now stood at 82, just one short of 7./JG 5's Franz Dörr. And then on 17 July, in the next major confrontation over Kirkenes, he claimed five (three P-40s and a pair of P-39s) against Dörr's four (a P-39, a Boston and two Yak-9s) to bring them level at 87 each.

But this was still a long way behind the *Gruppe's* two centurions, both of whom had also added to their scores during the 17 July action. Walter Schuck's seven (three Bostons and four P-39s) took his total to 135, while *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Heinrich Ehrler – now also fully recovered from wounds suffered on 30 May – demonstrated that he was back on form by despatching a trio of P-39s and a brace of P-40s to bring him up to 160.

The battle fought in the early evening of that 17 July, which lasted the best part of an hour and extended from Kirkenes out over Petsamo Bay, cost the Soviets 36 aircraft in all. The *Gruppe's* top four had accounted for 21 of them, with the remaining 15 divided between nine of the unit's other pilots. Among them, Oberleutnant Rudolf Glöckner and the now Leutnant Helmut Neumann got three apiece, while Leutnant Karl-Heinz Schneider and Unteroffizier Josef Suske each became an ace by claiming their fifth. Unfortunately, the latter pair would not enjoy their newfound status for long.

In the meantime, the four leading *Experten* continued to add to their already huge totals. On 21 July they were responsible for five of the seven P-40s downed in low-level dogfights off the Varanger Peninsula – the remaining pair had taken 9. *Staffel's* Oberfeldwebel August Lübking to his quarter-century. The next day they accounted for the majority of the 17 enemy fighters – all Lend-Lease P-39s or P-40s – destroyed during a sprawling, 60-minute pursuit that stretched from Kirkenes almost as far east as the Rybachiy Peninsula. Walter Schuck alone was credited with seven (five P-39s and a pair of P-40s).

Honours were more even on 28 July when the last skirmishes of the month ended with a further 12 victories for the pilots of III./JG 5. Walter Schuck, Franz Dörr, 'Jockl' Norz and August Lübking all got two each. Only Leutnant Helmut Neumann bucked the trend by claiming three (an Il-2 plus a pair of P-39s).

It was at this juncture that the *Gruppe* underwent a number of organisational and command changes. In an attempt to strengthen the Homeland's fighter defences in the face of the unremitting pressure of the USAAF daylight bombing offensive, all Defence of the Reich *Jagdgruppen* were increased in size from three component *Staffeln* to four. This included I. and II./JG 5, which were now made up of 1. to 4. *Staffeln* and 5. to 8. *Staffeln*, respectively. And this, in turn, necessitated a renumbering of III./JG 5's three *Staffeln* at Petsamo. The *Eismeerstaffel* reverted to being 9./JG 5, while 7. and 8. *Staffeln* were redesignated to become 10. and 11./JG 5. Finally, to bring III. *Gruppe* fully into line with the rest of the *Geschwader*, a totally new 12./JG 5 was formed.

The changes in command started at the top with the appointment of *Geschwaderkommodore* Oberstleutnant Günther Scholz to the post of *Jafü Norwegen* (Fighter-Leader Norway). His place at the head of the *Geschwader* was taken by Major Heinrich Ehrler, with Oberleutnant Franz Dörr replacing him as the new *Gruppenkommanduer* of III./JG 5. At *Staffel* level, 9./JG 5 (the ex-*Eismeerstaffel*) was still headed by Leutnant Werner Gayko. Dörr's old 7. *Staffel* – now 10./JG 5 – was given to the recently commissioned Leutnant Walter Schuck, 11./JG 5 remained, as before, in the hands of Oberleutnant Rudolf Glöckner, and the new 12./JG 5 was entrusted to (the now also commissioned) Leutnant Rudolf Linz.

With all these changes going on, it was perhaps fortunate that the far north saw very little operational activity during the first half of August. This came to a violent end on 17 August when the Soviets launched a concerted assault on German airfields and ports. Kirkenes, the primary target, was hit by a large force of bombers heavily escorted by fighters, while simultaneous diversionary attacks were carried out against Petsamo, Vadsø, Vardø and Svartnes. Every available fighter took to the air from Petsamo, and although the damage to III. *Gruppe's* own base was minor, Kirkenes (and Vadsø) suffered severely.

Once again, however, the enemy had been forced to pay a high price. III./JG 5's pilots were credited with bringing down 35 Soviet machines. Highest scorer of the day was Leutnant Jakob 'Jockl' Norz of the now 11./JG 5, whose five kills (four Bostons and an Airacobra) left him just two short of his century. Major Heinrich Ehrler, who was flying one last combat mission with the *Gruppe* (in the company of 11. *Staffel*) before



In his new role as *Geschwaderkommodore*, Major Heinrich Ehrler presents the Knight's Cross to Oberleutnant Franz Dörr, his successor as *Kommandeur* of III. *Gruppe*, at Petsamo in 19 August 1944

taking up his duties as *Geschwaderkommodore*, and Leutnant Walter Schuck, the new *Kapitän* of 10. *Staffel*, each got four, taking them up to 166 and 149, respectively.

Two other *Staffelkapitäne* reached significant milestones in their scoring during the 17 August engagements. 11./JG 5's Oberleutnant Rudolf Glöckner claimed four, the last of which gave him his quarter-century, while Leutnant Rudolf Linz of the new 12./JG 5 downed three to reach his half-century. That left Leutnant Werner Gayko of 9./JG 5 (the erstwhile *Eismeerstaffel*) trailing somewhat. His single success on this date, a twin-engined Petlyakov Pe-2, was only his eighth victory.

17 August also saw the first kills for Oberleutnant Franz Dörr in his new role as *Gruppenkommandeur* of III./JG 5. An Airacobra and a pair of Bostons brought his overall total up to 93, for which he was awarded the Knight's Cross (the last to be won by the *Geschwader* in the Arctic) two days later.

On the debit side, III./JG 5 suffered two fatalities during the 17 August engagements, one of them five-victory Leutnant Karl-Heinz Schneider of 10. *Staffel*, who was shot down not far from Petsamo airfield.

Despite their heavy losses, the Soviets must have regarded the 17 August raids as a success, for they repeated the same tactics six days later, only to sacrifice a further 25 of their aircraft. These would provide III./JG 5 with its last major success in the Arctic theatre and, fittingly perhaps, the bulk of them were shared between the *Gruppe*'s leading trio of Walter Schuck, Jakob Norz and Franz Dörr. It proved to be a special day for all three of them.

It was the first of the five victories claimed by Leutnant Walter Schuck on this 23 August, a Yak-9 brought down east of Kirkenes shortly after midday, that gave him number 150 and firmly established him as III./JG 5's current highest scorer. The pair of P-39s downed by Major Heinrich Ehrler some 30 minutes later were his first as *Geschwaderkommodore*. He would go on to add at least another four to his total before the end of September, for unlike his predecessor Oberstleutnant Günther Scholz – who is believed to have scored only one kill during his year's tenure of office – Heinrich Ehrler continued to fly combat missions whenever his new administrative responsibilities permitted.

Just moments after Ehrler had despatched his two Airacobras, the second of four Pe-2s credited to Leutnant Jakob Norz made him a centurion (and the addition of a P-39 during a later sortie meant that 'Jockl' Norz in fact ended the day on 103).

Meanwhile, *Gruppenkommandeur* Oberleutnant Franz Dörr had been the busiest of all, claiming no fewer than seven victories (a Boston, a P-40 and five P-39s) to the east of Kirkenes all within the space of an hour. And it was the last of the seven, a P-39 that he shot into Petsamo Bay at 1302 hrs, that took him to exactly 100.

More than a few bottles were emptied in celebration at Petsamo that evening – Schuck's 150th and the emergence of two new centurions! But

despite these personal successes, outside influences were at work ensuring that the *Gruppe's* days in the Arctic were numbered.

The Finnish–German alliance, forged in the summer of 1941 to fight a common enemy, was coming under increasing strain. After more than three years battling against the Soviet colossus, the Finnish army had been forced to retreat from the Karelian Isthmus. On 4 September

a new Finnish government agreed to end hostilities against the Soviet Union. One of the conditions for a peace treaty set by the Russians was that Finland had to sever relations with Germany and ensure that all German forces withdrew from Finnish soil.

Unaware of these developments, III./JG 5 continued its war against the Soviet air forces in the Arctic, although during the first half of September it managed to bring down only eight enemy aircraft. Then, on 15 September, Leutnant Schuck's 10. *Staffel* encountered some 20 Airacobras to the northwest of Petsamo and destroyed seven of them for the loss of one of its own. The following day 10. and 11. *Staffeln* accounted for 13 more Soviet aircraft during yet another bombing raid on Kirkenes, but only at an unexpected and grievous cost.

Having already downed one of the attacking Bostons, Leutnant Jakob Norz's own machine was damaged by return fire when he went after an Il-2. "“Yellow 8” here. My engine's been hit. It's smoking badly!" The others urged him to bail out, but Norz was determined to try to get back to Kirkenes airfield. He did not make it. Trailing a long plume of smoke, the *Gustav* steadily lost height until, finally, the call came over the radio, 'The controls aren't responding any more!' By this time Norz was down to 80 metres and too low to take to his parachute. The ground below was uneven and strewn with rocks, the Bf 109 duly smashing into a large boulder and disintegrating, killing 'Jockl' Norz instantly.

17 September was to result in another 13 victories when 10./JG 5 again tangled with Soviet fighters. The seemingly invulnerable Walter Schuck claimed four of them, all Yak-9s, during the late afternoon low-level dogfight over Kirkenes.

Two days later the Finnish Premier signed the armistice terms in Moscow. Together with many other conditions, these called for Finland 'to withdraw within her 1940 frontiers [in other words, to relinquish for good the Karelian Isthmus originally lost to the Russians in the Winter War of 1939-40], to pay reparations in commodities equivalent to the [then] sum of 300 million US dollars, to assist the Russians to drive out from Finland such German forces as still remained and to return the port of Petsamo [Pechenga] to Russia'.

All of which seemed to have had remarkably little effect on III./JG 5. Just 24 hours later, on 20 September, the pilots of 10. *Staffel* downed another four Soviet aircraft. In fact, far from evacuating Petsamo as the Finns were now demanding, III. *Gruppe* was instead reinforced by the arrival



104-victory Leutnant Jakob 'Jockl' Norz was buried in Petsamo war cemetery with full military honours. In the centre, the newly commissioned Leutnant Walter Schuck, now the *Staffelkapitän* of 10./JG 5, carries the 'awards cushion' displaying his fallen comrade's decorations



On 30 September 1944, a fortnight after 'Jockl' Norz was laid to rest, Leutnant Walter Schuck was awarded the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross. But it would be 7 November before the presentation ceremony took place in Berlin, with Schuck receiving the decoration from the hands of Luftwaffe C-in-C *Reichsmarschall* Herman Göring

of IV./JG 5 flying in from Norway to nearby Salmijärvi. Commanded by Hauptmann Fritz Stendel, a 42-victory ace previously of JG 51, this *Gruppe* was equipped with a mix of Bf 109s and Fw 190s. And it was not long before the newcomers were making their presence felt. Their first success is believed to have been the Airacobra claimed by 13. *Staffel's* Feldwebel Walter Felser on 23 September, which proved to be that day's only kill. Felser was credited with a second Arctic victory, a P-40 this time, two days later. The eight other kills of 25 September all went to the veterans of 10. *Staffel*, including four – a trio of P-39s plus one Il-2 – to Walter Schuck.

On 26 September the Soviets targeted Vardø. Aircraft of both III. and IV. *Gruppen* were scrambled in response, and claimed 12 of the raiders' escorting fighters. 10. *Staffel* was credited with six of them, Oberfeldwebel Heinz Arnold's trio of Yak-9s taking his total to 40. Another Yak-9 gave Feldwebel Heinz Halstrick of 13./JG 5 his first Arctic kill, whereas that claimed by *Geschwaderkommodore* Major Heinrich Ehrler, who had flown out over Petsamo Bay accompanied only by wingman *Geschwader-Adjutant* Hauptmann Rudolf Lüder to intercept the enemy force as it retired eastwards, would be the last of his 171 recorded Arctic victories.

Yet another Yak-9 downed over open water off the Varanger Peninsula gave Leutnant Helmut Neumann, now the *Staffelkapitän* of 14./JG 5, his half century. But, as a sign of the changing times, the day's 12 successes had cost the *Gruppen* five fighters lost and three pilots missing.

The end was clearly not far off, but the pilots of III./JG 5, aided now by IV./JG 5, carried on the fight. Among 27 September's total of 15 enemy aircraft destroyed was a pair of Bostons brought down east of Vadsø that proved to be the last known Arctic kills for Leutnant Walter Schuck. By a strange coincidence (or was it perhaps planned?), it would appear that the *Geschwader's* two most successful Arctic aces – Ehrler and Schuck – had finished equal with a score of 171 each!

Yet even at this late stage, new, if perforce short-lived, Arctic aces were still emerging. Another two of the six Bostons sent down on 27 September had been kills number five for Feldwebel David Wollmann and Leutnant Heinz Käppler of 10. and 15./JG 5, respectively, while an Airacobra claimed by the latter *Staffel's* Leutnant Fritz Simme was his first. Another Airacobra shot down 48 hours later – 29 September's only success – was also the first Arctic victory for the *Gruppenkommandeur* of IV./JG 5, Hauptmann Fritz Stendel.

The month ended on a welcome high note with the award of the Oak Leaves to Leutnant Walter Schuck on 30 September (although the celebrations were not so riotous this time as Schuck was in Bardufoss clinic recovering from dental surgery when he received the news). But this personal achievement was effectively eclipsed by Finland commencing hostilities against Germany the very next day. This inevitably led to clashes between the erstwhile brothers-in-arms, and the first recorded instance of such, at least as far as JG 5 was concerned, was Feldwebel Rudolf Artner's shooting down of a Ju 88 bearing Finnish air force markings on the afternoon of 6 October.

Four days later two more Finnish Ju 88s were added to III. *Gruppe's* collective scoreboard, one for Oberleutnant Werner Gayko and a second

for Feldwebel Artner. However, as these kills were recorded at a time when 9. *Staffel* (to which both pilots belonged) was based at Rovaniemi, there is every likelihood that the *Gruppe's* three Finnish victims all went down over central Finland rather than above the Arctic Circle.

But it was in the far north, and against the traditional foe, that the final act of JG 5's Arctic odyssey would be played out. A dogfight on the afternoon of 7 October had produced yet another new ace when the pair of P-39s claimed by the now Oberfeldwebel Walter Felser of 13./JG 5 brought his tally up to six.

7 October was also the date on which the Soviets launched their major ground offensive aimed at driving the Germans out of northern Finland. With their bases directly in the path of the Russian advance, the pilots of III. and IV./JG 5 soon found themselves flying shuttle missions in support of the hard-pressed mountain troops. 8 October saw almost constant activity as the two *Gruppen* battled with the enemy in the air and strafed communist troops on the ground. They claimed nine aerial victories, one of them – a Yak-9 shot down east of Petsamo – being number five for Oberfeldwebel Heinz Birk of the *Gruppenstab* III./JG 5.

Oberleutnant Hans Kirchmeier, who had gained his first victory as a *Zerstörer* pilot with 10.(Z)/JG 5 back in May 1942, but who was now flying Fw 190s as a member of 13. *Staffel*, was responsible for two of the day's nine kills – a P-39 and an Il-2. The former was his fifth, which finally made him an ace. His machine was presumably damaged in the course of a later ground-attack sortie, however, for he attempted to belly-land it back at Petsamo without realising – or perhaps simply forgetting – that he was still carrying two fragmentation bombs underwing. They exploded on contact with the ground, blowing the Focke-Wulf and its occupant to pieces.

The Soviet pressure was unrelenting, with 9 October being, if anything, even more hectic than the day before. It resulted in a total of 23 kills, six of them – a Yak-9, two Pe-2s and three P-39s – all being brought down to the southeast of III. *Gruppe's* Petsamo base by *Kommandeur* Hauptmann Franz Dörr. The *Gruppenstab's* day-old ace, Oberfeldwebel Heinz Birk, claimed an Il-2 and a pair of P-39s in the same area to bring his tally up to eight.

Leutnant Helmut Neumann got four – two P-39s and two Bostons – to reach his 60th, and the day also produced yet another ace when 10. *Staffel's* Oberfeldwebel Martin Villing downed a P-39 near Petsamo to make it five (and added a Yak-9 an hour later just for good measure).

But the day's only loss was also an ace, Unteroffizier Josef Suske of 10./JG 5 being hit by a mobile flak gun. He managed to bail out of his 'Black 7', but his parachute malfunctioned and was only half-open when he struck the ground close to Petsamo.

By 10 October Petsamo airfield itself was coming under enemy mortar fire and III./JG 5 began withdrawing to Kirkenes. The last machine to leave the base that had been home to the *Gruppe* for the past 30 months was the *Stab's* Storch hack, which finally lifted off at 1010 hrs on 11 October. But the move had simply taken them out of the frying-pan into the fire, for Kirkenes had suffered the first of a series of heavy bombing raids that same day. The airfield and harbour were both badly damaged. The two *Gruppen* (IV./JG 5 was still at Salmijäri) succeeded in bringing down just three of the day's attackers.

Spanning almost the entire period of JG 5's Arctic campaign, Oberleutnant Hans Kirchmeier had claimed his first kill as a *Zerstörer* pilot with 10.(Z)/JG 5 back on 18 May 1942. Nearly two-and-a-half years later, now a member of 13. *Staffel*, he finally attained ace status by downing a P-39 on 8 October 1944, only to lose his life in a belly landing back at Petsamo that same day





The end of an era. A lone *Gustav* peels away over Lake Urd, east of the Litsa, the scene of so many of JG 5's triumphs, and tragedies

They nearly tripled that figure 24 hours later when three of the eight victories claimed were credited to Hauptmann Franz Dörr, the two Il-2s and single P-39 raising his overall total to 110. Somewhat lower down the scoring scale, another P-39 made an ace of 15. *Staffel's* Leutnant August Schneider. 15./JG 5 gained – and lost – another ace three days later. In the mid-morning of 15 October Leutnant Fritz Simme had just disposed of four of the

enemy – an La-5 and an unlikely trio of U-2 biplanes(!) – over Petsamo, taking his total to six, when he too was hit by Soviet flak. He was unable to escape from the burning wreckage of his aircraft before it hit the ground.

It was on 15 October that the Russians finally re-captured Petsamo. The writing was now clearly on the wall. Over the next few days IV. *Gruppe* departed Salmijärvi for nearby Nautsi, while III./JG 5 left Kirkenes for the 130-kilometre flight southwest to Kaamanen. Despite these enforced withdrawals the two *Gruppen* added a further 20 kills to their collective scoreboards between 16 and 20 October. Then, on 21 October, came the last major confrontations with the enemy as III. and IV./JG 5 fought a number of engagements over and around their recently vacated airfields at Petsamo, Kirkenes and Salmijärvi. These produced a total of 17 kills in all, the last time a day's victories would be numbered in double figures.

Among those 17 were five for Hauptmann Franz Dörr, the *Kommandeur* of III. *Gruppe*. The single Il-2, two P-39s and two Bostons he sent down close to Kirkenes took his final Arctic score to 122. On a more modest level, the two Yak-9s claimed by fellow-*Kommandeur* Hauptmann Fritz Stendel of IV./JG 5 brought his tally of Arctic kills to six, which duly qualified him as an ace. But he was not to be the last of JG 5's Arctic aces. That distinction went to 13. *Staffel's* Feldwebel Heinz Halstrick, whose fifth was an Il-2 shot down on 24 October. And it was Halstrick who was also credited with the *Geschwader's* very last recorded Arctic kill of them all when he downed a Boston on 29 October.

JG 5's air war against the Soviets in the Arctic – a war unlike any other fought by the Jagdwaffe on the eastern front; a virtually static war waged primarily against Russian-flown British and American Lend-Lease aircraft from start to finish – was finally over.

On 6 November IV./JG 5 left Nautsi for Stavanger, in southern Norway. Two days later Hauptmann Franz Dörr's III./JG 5 also retired across the Finnish border to Bardufoss, in northern Norway, where they immediately began re-equipping with Fw 190s. And it was while they were in the middle of their conversion programme, on 12 November, that RAF Lancasters bombed and sank the German battleship *Tirpitz* berthed in nearby Tromsø Fjord – a disaster for which Major Heinrich Ehrler, the *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 5, was held responsible and summarily dismissed from his command. But that, as they are wont to say, is another story altogether.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

DECORATIONS (KNIGHT'S CROSS AND ABOVE) AWARDED TO MEMBERS OF *JAGDGESCHWADER 5* 'EISMEER' DURING (OR FOR) SERVICE IN THE ARCTIC

DATE	NAME/RANK	AWARD	NUMBER OF KILLS
1/8/41	Dahmer, Obfw Hugo*	KC	22
25/9/41	Carganico, Oblt Horst*	KC	27
19/6/42	Müller, Fw Rudolf	KC	46
21/10/42	Ehrler, Ltn Heinrich	KC	41
13/11/42	Bartels, Fw Heinrich	KC	45
13/11/42	Weissenberger, Ltn Theodor	KC	38
3/7/43	Brunner, Obfw Albert	KC(†)	53
2/8/43	Ehrler, Hptm Heinrich	OL	112
2/8/43	Weissenberger, Oblt Theodor	OL	112
19/8/43	Strakeljahn, Hptm Friedrich-Wilhelm	KC	9
19/9/43	Döbrich, Fw Hans	KC	65
26/3/44	Norz, Obfw Jakob	KC	70
8/4/44	Schuck, Obfw Walter	KC	84
19/8/44	Dörr, Hptm Franz	KC	93
30/9/44	Schuck, Ltn Walter	OL	171
24/10/44	Mors, Ltn August	KC(†)	60
12/3/45	Neumann, Ltn Helmut	KC	62
?/3/45	Linz, Ltn Rudolf	KC(†)	53

Notes and Abbreviations

Number of kills refers to the pilot's score at the time the award was first announced, although the recipient may have added to his total by the time of the presentation

* – awarded while serving with 1./JG 77 prior to that *Staffel*'s redesignation as 6./JG 5

KC – Knight's Cross

OL – Oak Leaves

(†) – (Posthumous)

APPENDIX 2

ARCTIC ACES OF *JAGDGESCHWADER 5* 'EISMEER'*

ARCTIC VICTORIES WITH JG 5	NAME/RANK	STAFFEL(N)	DATE OF FIFTH VICTORY	TOTAL SCORE	OTHER JG(s)	FATE
171	Ehrler, Ltn Heinrich	4., 6., GpK III, GesK	4/3/42	182	77	KIA 4/4/45
171	Schuck, Uffz Walter	7., 9., 10.	22/6/42	181	7	S
143	Weissenberger, Fw Theodor	6.(Z), 10.(Z), 13.(Z), 6., 7., GpK I.	25/2/42	208	(Z)77, 7	S

122	Dörr, Obfw Franz	7., III.	9/9/42	122		S
104	Norz, Fw Jakob	8. (11.)	28/2/43	104	NTG 2, 51, 1	KIA 16/9/44
~92	Müller, Uffz Rudolf	6.	28/3/41	94	77	PoW 19/4/43
65	Döbrich, Uffz Hans	6.	19/5/42	65		S
60	Neumann, Uffz Helmut	7., III., 14.	18/8/43	62		S
53+	Brunner, Fw Albert	6.	19/7/42	53+		KIA 7/5/43
51	Linz, Obfw Rudolf	8. (11.), 12.	23/9/43	53		KIA 9/2/45
~50	Carganico, Oblt Horst	6., II., I.	?/7/41	66	1, 77	KIA 27/5/44
47	Bartels, Uffz Heinrich	8.	17/5/42	94	26, 27	KIA 23/12/44
41	Arnold, Fw Heinz	7. (10.)	11/5/44	48	1, 7	MIA 17/4/45
39	Mors, Uffz August	6.	29/4/43	58		DoW 8/8/44
34	Lübking, Fw August	9.	25/5/44	38	7	KIA 28/3/45
30	Pfränger, Obfw Willi	6.	?	30+	77	S
30	Schumacher, Uffz Werner	7.	15/5/42	30		PoW 5/8/42
29	Glöckner, Oblt Rudolf	6., 8. (11.)	25/5/44	33	7	S
28	Dahmer, Obfw Hugo	6.	29/6/41	45	26, 77, 2	S
27+	Beyer, Fw Heinz	8.	2/6/42	27+	1	?
27	Widowitz, Oblt Wulf-Dietrich	5., 9.	13/6/42	29	77	KAS 28/7/43
26	Berger, Ltn Horst	8.	22/5/43	26		MIA 8/5/44
25	Dahn, Ltn Friedrich	5.	13/2/42	25	77	MIA 25/5/42
25	Salwender, Obfw Florian	5.	?	25	77	PoW 23/4/42
24	Klante, Uffz Helmut	7.	2/9/42	24	JV 44	S
23	Lehner, Fw Alfred	5.	3/9/43	35	7	KIA 4/4/45
~20	Schaschke, Hptm Gerhard	ZG 76	4/7/41	20+		KIA 4/8/41
18	Scharf, Uffz Ludwig	6.	?	18	?	PoW 15/9/42
~18	Villing, Obfw Martin	2., 7. (10.)	17/9/44	20	77	S
17	Artner, Uffz Rudolf	9.	26/5/44	20		S
17	Beth, Uffz Arthur	7.	4/7/43	17		PoW 3/1/44
~17	Fiedler, Uffz Reinhold	6.(Z), 10.(Z), 13.(Z), 7.	10/5/42	17	(Z)/77	S
16	Suske, Uffz Josef	7. (10.)	17/4/44	16		KIA 9/10/44
15	Käppler, Fw Heinz	11., 15.	30/3/43	23		KIA 24/3/45
14	Kunz, Fw Josef	8.	24/1/43	17	4	S
14	Rolly, Fw Horst	6.	8/6/43	23+	400	KIA 2/11/44
13	Diepen, Ltn Hans-Bruno	8.	18/8/43	13		DoW 8/3/44
13	Gayko, Ltn Werner	7., 9.	12/6/44	14		S
13	Weinitschke, Uffz Dieter	5.	19/5/42	13	77	PoW 12/3/43
12	Hartwein, Oblt Hans-Dieter	6.	29/6/42	16	77	KIA 21/8/42
12	Schulze, Obfw Ernst	8.	16/5/44	12		?
12	Segatz, Oblt Hermann	8., GS	15/6/42	33	51, 26, 1	KIA 8/3/44
11+	Kischnick, Fw Helmut	9.	12/7/43	11+	?	?
11	Birk, Obfw Heinz	7. (10.), III.	8/10/44	14		?
11	Brandis, Ltn Felix-Maria	6.(Z)	30/7/41	14	ZG 76, (Z)77	KIA 2/2/42
11	Felser, Obfw Walter	13.	7/10/44	11		S

11	von Hermann, Ltn Bernhard	7., 8.	21/2/44	11		PoW 17/3/44
11	Kaiser, Uffz Josef	8.	6/8/42	11	2	S
10+	Herzog, Obfw Otto	8.	11/9/42	10+	?	?
10	Rohde, Uffz Peter	7.	12/4/44	10		MIA 23/4/44
10	Vollet, Fhr Hans	7., 16.	12/4/44	11	?	?
9	Amend, Uffz Hermann	9.	17/3/44	10		KIA 5/8/44
9	Hammel, Ltn Kurt	4.	28/5/42	19	77, 27	S
9	Kurpiers, Obfw Rudolf	6.(Z), 10.(Z), 13.(Z)	28/6/42	11	(Z)77, ZG 26	S
9	Wiegand, Fw Heinrich-Friedrich	9.	5/6/44	9	?	?
~9	Tetzner, Oblt Hans	6., 5., GpK II.	30/4/42	15+	77	KIA 19/7/44
8+	Mendl, Fw Artur	5.	3/9/43	8+	?	?
8	Beulich, Obfw Erich-Walter	7.	4/7/43	10	77	MIA 14/9/43
8	Eichhorn, Ltn Günter	7., 9.	23/9/43	8		PoW 2/12/43
8	Halstrick, Fw Heinz	13.	24/10/44	11		S
8	Munding, Obfw Karl	6.(Z), 10.(Z), 13.(Z)	10/5/42	8	(Z)77	MIA 6/3/43
8	Stratmann, Fw Emil	1., 6.	22/4/42	8		KIA 12/3/43
8	Thomann, Uffz Hans	9.	19/6/43	8		KIA 19/8/43
7+	Bahr, Ltn Hans-Joachim	8.	17/6/42	7+		MIA 13/7/42
7	Brunner, Uffz Friedrich	7.	4/7/44	7		?
7	Erdmann, Ltn Christian	5., I.	14/9/43	7	27	?
7	Geisen, Ltn Walter	7.	5/6/43	7		KIA 22/6/43
7	Schneider, Ltn August	5., 15	12/10/44	9		S
7	Schumann, Ltn Friedrich	III., 9.	24/9/43	7		KIA 26/9/43
7	Thimm, Fw Oskar	8.	14/9/43	7	?	?
7	Vögel, Ltn Karl-Heinrich	5., 7.	25/11/43	7		KIA 16/1/44
~7	Lesch, Ltn Heinrich	6.	28/3/42	7	77	?
~7	Schanz, Uffz Ludwig	6.	9/9/42	7+	77	PoW 15/9/42
~7	Schmidt, Hptm Hans-Hermann	6.(Z), 10.(Z), 13.(Z), 7., 9.	?	7		PoW 11/1/44
~7	Stephan, Ltn Horst	9.	29/1/44	7	?	?
6	Franzisket, Oblt Max	6.(Z), 10.(Z), 13.(Z)	24/6/42	6	ZG 76, (Z)77, ZG 1	MIA 19/7/43
6	Jakobi, Ltn Alfred	5.	4/1/42	9	77	PoW 9/4/42
6	Kirchmeier, Oblt Hans	13.(Z), 13.	8/10/44	6		KIA 8/10/44
6	Klaus, Uffz Berthold	5., 14.	3/11/43	7		KIA 2/11/44
6	Knier, Fw Leopold	6.	7/7/42	7	27, JV 44	S
6	Koschak, Ltn Helmut	5.	13/10/43	11	2	?
6	Lamprecht, Ltn Wolfgang	4., 5.	20/9/43	6		KIA 17/12/43
6	Rost, Ltn Wolfgang	7., 8.	25/11/43	6		PoW 29/2/44
6	Scholz, Hptm Günther	Gpk III., GesK	12/8/42	32	(21) 54	S
6	Simme, Ltn Fritz	15.	15/10/44	6		KIA 15/10/44
6	Stendel, Hptm Fritz	GpK IV.	21/10/44	48	(20) 51	S
~6	Lüdecke, Ltn Friedrich	6.	24/1/43	~6	26	PoW 25/1/43
5+	Andresen, Oblt Lorenz	9.	26/5/44	5+		KIA 20/7/44

5+	Bössenecker, Fw Josef	9., 12.	7/9/44	5+		S
5+	Drössler, Fw Kurt	9.	25/11/43	5+	?	KIA 10/4/44
5+	Menzel, Oblt Franz	3., 5.	13/6/42	8+	ZG 2, 77	S
5+	Schlossstein, Oblt Karl-Fritz	6.(Z), 10.(Z), 13.(Z)	10/5/42	5+	(Z)77, ZG 101, 54, 1	S
5+	Wollmann, Fw David	10.	27/9/44	6+	?	?
5	Baldes, Obfw Josef	7.	28/6/44	5		?
5	Degener, Uffz Karl-Franz	6.	24/9/43	6	6, 7	S
5	Döring, Uffz Walter	5.	23/6/42	5	?	?
5	Lork, Fhj Uffz Heinz	7.(10.)	15/9/44	5	?	?
5	Maul, Oblt Werner	6.(Z), 10.(Z), 13.(Z)	12/6/43	5	ZG 76, 54	MIA 2/2/45
5	Mayer, Fw Rudolf	8.	19/8/43	5	?	?
5	Reinhold, Fw Gerhard	4.	12/10/43	36	7	KIA 4/4/45
5	Scheufele, Ltn Ernst	5.	16/5/44	14	4	PoW 3/12/44
5	Schmidt, Ltn Heinrich	6.	24/9/43	6		KIA 11/12/43
5	Schneider, Ltn Karl-Heinz	8., 10.	17/7/44	5		KIA 17/8/44
5	Schwanecke, Oblt Günther	1., 4., II.	2/4/44	14	4	S
5	Steinbach, Uffz Richard	7.	23/1/43	5	3	S
5	Weyl, Oblt Gerhard	4.	3/11/43	8+	6	S

Notes and Abbreviations

(*) Lists all known Arctic aces (five or more victories) but is not definitive due to the many gaps and inconsistencies in the source records and reference material. (Note: a total preceded by '~' denotes 'approximately')

Name/Rank: rank shown as at time of fifth victory

Staffel(n): indicates those with which the ace is known to have served within the *Geschwader*. A Roman numeral means that the ace served with that particular *Gruppenstab*, while GS denotes service with the *Geschwaderstab*; GpK is *Gruppenkommandeur* and GesK is *Geschwaderkommodore*

Total score: includes all known victories achieved both with JG 5 (in theatres other than the Arctic) and/or with other units as indicated

Other JG(s): refers to units (excluding schools and training establishments) that the ace is known to have served with during his operational career. No number indicates that he served solely with JG 5. A question mark signifies 'not known'. A number either preceded or succeeded by another one in brackets denotes a *Geschwader* redesignation (JV is *Jagdverband*, NJG is *Nachtjagdgeschwader* and ZG is *Zerstörergeschwader*)

Fate: Abbreviations as follows:

KIA – killed in action

MIA – missing in action

KAS – killed on active service

DoW – died of wounds

PoW – prisoner of war

S – known to have survived war

COLOUR PLATES

1

Bf 110E-2 'M8+YE' of Hauptmann Gerhard Schaschke, 1.(Z)/JG 77, Kirkenes, Norway, July 1941

One of the Luftwaffe's early Arctic aces, Hauptmann Gerhard Schaschke reportedly turned down the chance to become the *Kapitän* of JG 5's *Zerstörerstaffel*, preferring instead to concentrate solely on operational flying and increasing his own personal score. His exact total at the time of his loss on 4 August 1941, however, is no longer known (the tailfin tally shown here indicates 15 aerial victories and three ships sunk), nor is it certain with which unit Schaschke served prior to his posting to Kirkenes, although the fuselage code on his Bf 110 would seem to suggest the *Gruppenstab* of the planned, but never fully activated, IV./ZG 76.

2

Bf 109E-7 'White 7' of Oberfeldwebel Hugo Dahmer, 1./JG 77, Petsamo, Finland, August 1941

The details of Oberfeldwebel Hugo Dahmer's career prior to his becoming the Arctic's first Knight's Cross winner are much better documented than the career of Gerhard Schaschke. He claimed 11 victories (two of them unconfirmed) with JG 26 during the Battles of France and Britain before adding a further 26+ during his six months in the Arctic. Dahmer subsequently returned to the west, but was severely wounded in a dogfight with RAF Spitfires over France on 11 September 1943. His *Emil* seen here in artwork is devoid of any unit or personal markings other than the 22 victory bars displayed on the rudder.

3

Bf 109E-7 'White 11' of Oberleutnant Horst Carganico, *Staffelkapitän* 1./JG 77, Petsamo, Finland, autumn 1941

In addition to the rudder scoreboard with its 27 victory bars, the machine flown by Oberleutnant Horst Carganico – Dahmer's *Staffelkapitän* and recipient of the Arctic's second Knight's Cross – wears an all-yellow cowling (and is fitted with what appears to be a polished metal spinner) and carries Carganico's personal badge, depicting his pet Scottish terrier, beneath the windscreen. After gaining fame in the Arctic, Carganico, like Dahmer, would meet his fate over France, losing his life in action against USAAF B-17s on 27 May 1944.

4

Bf 110E-2 'LN+LR' of Oberleutnant Felix-Maria Brandis, *Staffelkapitän* 6.(Z)/JG 5, Kirkenes, Norway, winter 1941-42

The operational career of Oberleutnant Felix-Maria Brandis, the officer Gerhard Schaschke declined to replace as *Kapitän* of the *Zerstörerstaffel*, was nothing if not eventful. Twice rescued after ditchings at sea, he followed wrong radio bearings on 1 September 1941 and landed by mistake in Sweden, where he and his aircraft both suffered brief internment. Brandis then wrote off a third Bf 110 in a forced landing before his luck finally ran out when he crashed in bad weather on 2 February 1942. 'LN+LR' (not the machine in which he was killed) displays all 14 of his confirmed victories, the last, a MiG-3, claimed on 29 November 1941.

5

Bf 109E 'White 2' of Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler, 4./JG 5, Alakurtti, Finland, March 1942

One of JG 5's true greats, Heinrich Ehrler initially served as a Leutnant with 4. *Staffel*, whose badge – a sword decapitating a Russian bear – is seen here adorning the engine cowling of his 'White 2'. Note the toned-down white areas of the fuselage *Balkenkreuz* and the eight victory bars on the rudder (the last representing a Hurricane brought down on 24 March 1942).

6

Bf 109E 'Black Chevron and Bars' of Feldwebel Leopold Knier, 6./JG 5, Kirkenes, Norway, April 1942

Indicative of the somewhat *ad hoc* nature of JG 5's early months, when a small detachment of pilots from both II. and III. *Gruppen* was deployed to Kirkenes, 6. *Staffel*'s Feldwebel Leopold Knier found himself flying a machine (previous owner unknown) bearing *Major beim Stab* markings. Knier would achieve six victories in the Murmansk area between May and July 1942 before being captured by the Russians, who tried, unsuccessfully, to 'turn' him (see main text). Later in the war he flew with I./JG 27 in the west, being credited with at least one further kill – a B-17 shot down during the Eighth Air Force's Schweinfurt raid of 14 October 1943.

7

Bf 109F-4 'Yellow 7' of Feldwebel Albert Brunner, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, June 1942

II. *Gruppe* began converting to the Bf 109F in May/June 1942. This pristine example – bearing no distinguishing markings other than its individual 'Yellow 7' numeral – was the mount of Feldwebel Albert Brunner. It displays the non-standard, segmented 'stone-brown'/dark green finish common to nearly all of II./JG 5's early *Friedrichs*. Brunner had claimed his first victory (a Hurricane) on 29 May 1942, although whether he was flying this particular machine at the time is uncertain. He would add a further 50+ kills prior to his death on 7 May 1943, and was later honoured with a posthumous Knight's Cross.

8

Bf 109F-4 'Yellow 10' of Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, June 1942

Very similar in overall appearance to Brunner's 'Yellow 7' above, 'Yellow 10' has been embellished by the addition of 6. *Staffel*'s four-leaf clover badge on the engine cowling and 18 victory bars on the rudder denoting pilot Unteroffizier Hans Döbrich's current score, the 18th being a single P-40 downed southeast of Petsamo on 30 June 1942. Döbrich would take his total to 65 – all claimed while a member of 6. *Staffel* – before being seriously wounded on 16 July, which ended his operational career. He was awarded the Knight's Cross on 19 September 1943.

9

Bf 109E 'Black 13' of Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, June 1942

Although III./JG 5 began re-equipping with Bf 109Fs in March 1942, some two months before II. *Gruppe* took delivery of its first

Friedrichs, both units retained a small number of Bf 109Es throughout much of the remainder of the year. This particular example, bearing the 'Edelweiss' badge of 8. *Staffel*, was flown by Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels early on in a career that would see him amass an overall total of 94 victories – equally split between east and west – before being killed in action engaging USAAF P-47s at the height of the Battle of the Ardennes.

10

Bf 109E-7 'Black 8' of Unteroffizier Josef Kaiser, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, June 1942

Another *Emil* of 8. *Staffel*, albeit minus the unit badge, was Josef Kaiser's 'Black 8'. With just two kills under his belt at this stage, Kaiser's subsequent career was very different to that of fellow Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels. Kaiser's score had risen to 11 by the time he was shot down and captured by the Russians on 26 December 1942. Like Feldwebel Leopold Knier (see profile 6), he too was 'recruited' to spy for the Soviets and dropped by parachute over northern Finland. He was later posted to JG 2 in the west, but is not known to have achieved any further victories.

11

Bf 110F-2 'LN+MR' of Oberfeldwebel Theodor Weissenberger, 10.(Z)/JG 5, Kirkenes, Norway, June 1942

Third in JG 5's top trio of Arctic *Experten*, Theo Weissenberger claimed his first 23 victories as a member of the *Zerstörerstaffel* (the last of the 21 depicted here on the tailfin of his Bf 110 being a P-40 shot down southwest of Murmansk on 1 June 1942). After converting to the Bf 109, Weissenberger would add a further 120 kills to his Arctic tally before transferring to the main eastern front and thence to the west, where his final 33 victories included seven B-17s brought down while serving as *Geschwaderkommodore* of the Me 262-equipped JG 7.

12

Bf 110E-2 'LN+HR' of Oberfeldwebel Karl Munding, 13.(Z)/JG 5, Kirkenes, Norway, July 1942

One of the *Zerstörerstaffel*'s lesser lights in terms of aerial victories (he claimed just eight Soviet victims in the 11 months from July 1941 to June 1942), Oberfeldwebel Karl Munding was by all accounts a highly proficient and successful fighter-bomber pilot. Exact details of such operations are rather sparse, however, and little is known of his later career other than the fact that, according to at least one source, he was reported missing in March 1942. Note here the recently introduced unit emblem of a 'Dachshund and a *Rata* clamped in its jaws' on the nose of 'HR'.

13

Bf 109F-4 'Red 14' of Unteroffizier Dietrich Weinitschke, 5./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, July 1942

Another of II. *Gruppe*'s distinctively segmented *Friedrichs*, this example sports the 'Polar bear' badge of 5. *Staffel* and shows obvious signs of previous ownership – note the repainted patch behind the individual numeral 'Red 14', which identifies it as the aircraft now flown by Unteroffizier Dietrich Weinitschke. All of his 13 recorded victories were achieved while serving with this *Staffel*, the first two under its original designation as 14./JG 77 and the last being a Hurricane downed on 19 February 1943. Weinitschke was

himself shot down in a dogfight near Murmansk on 12 March 1943 and spent the next six years in Soviet captivity.

14

Bf 109F-4 'Yellow 6' of Oberleutnant Hans-Dieter Hartwein, *Staffelkapitän* 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, July 1942

Hans-Dieter Hartwein had already claimed four RAF kills while based in Norway prior to his posting to Petsamo to take over as *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 5 from Oberleutnant Horst Carganico. During his 12-week tenure of office Hartwein added 12 'Soviet' machines (which, in fact, included eight Hurricanes and a Spitfire) to his tally before being killed on 21 August 1942 while trying to force-land his damaged 'Yellow 6' after a dogfight with Yaks to the west of Murmashi.

15

Bf 109F-4 'Yellow 12' of Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, July 1942

Hartwein would in turn be replaced as *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 5 by Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler, recently transferred across from 4. *Staffel* (see profile 5). Wearing II. *Gruppe*'s trademark camouflage scheme (which was not a standard factory finish, but one that was reportedly applied at a Luftwaffe depot prior to final delivery, hence the slight variations in the patterning), this *Friedrich* is distinguished by its pilot's newly adopted 'lucky' number 12 and a lengthening list of victories on the rudder, the last of the 30 depicted here representing a Hurricane claimed south of Murmansk on 8 July 1942.

16

Bf 109F-4 'Black Chevron and Triangle' of Hauptmann Horst Carganico, *Gruppenkommandeur* II./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, summer 1942

Yet another example of the Luftwaffe depot's camouflage artistry, the machine of Hauptmann Horst Carganico, now the *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 5, displays several points of interest, not least the cockpit canopy, which appears to be that of an early 'E'-variant fitted with an additional armoured windscreen panel. Note too that Carganico's previous 'Scottie dog' personal badge (see profile 3) has now been replaced by a small '*Micky-Maus*' on the engine cowl. Exact details of Carganico's many victories are still unclear, but on the impressive rudder scoreboard seen here, kill bars number 1-5, 28 and 32-33 bear RAF roundels, while the remaining 40 are all decorated with red stars.

17

Bf 109E 'White 14' of Unteroffizier Helmut Neumann, 7./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, late summer 1942

Typical of the *Emils* that soldiered on with III. *Gruppe* into the second half of 1942, this machine, although sporting the 'Edelweiss' badge of 8./JG 5, was in fact flown by 7. *Staffel*'s Unteroffizier Helmut Neumann. The archetypal wingman, it would be nearly a year before Neumann achieved his own first victory (a Hurricane downed on 22 July 1943) and then a serious neck wound kept him off operations for a further seven months. It was in the spring of 1944 that his career really took off, Neumann claiming 51 of his 60 Arctic kills in the five months from May to October of that year and ending the war as a Leutnant wearing the Knight's Cross.

18

Bf 109F 'Black 13' of Unteroffizier Heinrich Bartels, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, September 1942

Unlike II./JG 5's sharply defined segmented camouflage scheme, the *Friedrichs* of III. *Gruppe* were given an altogether 'softer' finish, albeit in very similar colours (presumably both were intended to blend in with the Arctic tundra terrain). While retaining his 'lucky 13' individual numeral, Bartels' Bf 109F does display several differences from his earlier *Emil* (see profile 9). The 8. *Staffel* badge beneath the windscreen has now been combined with III. *Gruppe*'s crest of a 'Lapp boot on the Finnish blue and white cross', the name *Hella* has been added below the cockpit sill and Bartels' rudder scoreboard has grown from eight to 32 (the last three a trio of Russian fighters all downed on 11 September 1942).

19

Bf 109F-4 'Yellow 12' of Leutnant Heinrich Ehrler, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, autumn 1942

The onset of JG 5's second Arctic winter gave rise to numerous individual winter camouflage schemes such as that shown here, a dense white overspray that has totally transformed Heinrich Ehrler's *Friedrich*. The wielder of the spray gun has, however, taken great pains not to obscure the national insignia and Ehrler's 'Yellow 12' numeral. Note the newly introduced horizontal bar behind the fuselage *Balkenkreuz* – the official symbol for a *Geschwader*'s II. *Gruppe* (compare with profile 15) – and the now even more impressive rudder scoreboard, the last two bars of which denote kills 59 and 60 (a pair of Hurricanes claimed on 19 September 1942).

20

Bf 109F 'Yellow 9' of Unteroffizier Walter Schuck, 9./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, winter 1942-43

The ground mechanic responsible for 'wintering' Walter Schuck's machine has had no such qualms – here the overspray has been liberally applied over both the fuselage *Balkenkreuz* and the tail swastika (note that the former is the 'open' style of cross consisting of the white areas only) and has all but obscured the aircraft's individual 'Yellow 9' numeral.

21

Bf 109G-2/R6 'Yellow 3' of Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Müller, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, March 1943

Another variation on the winter theme, this heavily mottled '*Kanonboot*' ('gunboat' – note the underwing cannon gondolas) is the 'Yellow 3' that 94-victory ace Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Müller was forced to put down on its belly on a frozen lake a few kilometres to the east of Murmansk on 19 April 1943. What exactly happened to 'Rudi' Müller after his capture by the Soviets is still the subject of conjecture.

22

Bf 109F-4 'Black 4' of Feldwebel Ernst Schulze, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, March 1943

A strong contender for the most artistic – if ineffective – winter camouflage scheme was Ernst Schulze's 'Black 4', whose delicate white curlicues did little to break up the overall dark finish of the machine. Note the twin *Gruppe/Staffel* badges below the windscreen (see profile 18) and also what is clearly a replacement rudder from another white-camouflaged aircraft. Schulze gained the first of his 12 Arctic kills on 13 March 1943. It would be the end of the year before he got his second.

23

Bf 109G-2 'Black 14' of Unteroffizier Rudolf Mayer, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, April 1943

A more traditional *meander*, or 'scribble', finish has been applied to Rudolf Mayer's early *Gustav*. Two points to note here – the slightly different style of the '4' in the aircraft's individual numeral compared to that carried by Ernst Schulze's 'Black 4' immediately above (indicating that 8. *Staffel*'s paintshop presumably had more than one set of stencils) and the solid black disc behind the fuselage *Balkenkreuz*. III./JG 5's choice of a disc was somewhat unusual as this symbol was more commonly used to identify a *Geschwader*'s IV. (fourth) *Gruppe*, the official III. *Gruppe* designator being a vertical bar. Mayer scored his first kill exactly ten days after Ernst Schulze, and he would claim his fifth on 19 August 1943.

24

Bf 109G-2/R6 'Micky-Maus' of Hauptmann Horst Carganico, Gruppenkommandeur II./JG 5, Salmijärvi, Finland, spring 1943

When it came to non-regulation markings, Hauptmann Horst Carganico's early 'G' gunboat really *was* in a class of its own! The previously unobtrusive little '*Micky-Maus*' cartoon figure that had adorned his earlier *Friedrichs* (see profile 16) had been greatly enlarged and moved aft to where it now replaced the official 'Double chevron' (or 'Chevron and triangle') symbol of a *Gruppenkommandeur* ahead of the fuselage *Balkenkreuz*. This machine carried no horizontal bar (indicating II. *Gruppe*) behind the cross, although this would be applied to Carganico's later *Gustavs*.

25

Bf 109G-2/R6 'Yellow 10' of Feldwebel Hans Döbrich, 6./JG 5, Salmijärvi, Finland, spring 1943

As winter gave way to spring, Hans Döbrich's groundcrew apparently decided not to remove the areas of white camouflage paint from his favoured 'Yellow 10', but opted instead to apply additional patches of a disruptive darker green on top of them to give this striking 'spring thaw' three-tone finish.

26

Bf 109G-2/R6 'Yellow 4' of Leutnant Theodor Weissenberger, 6./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, May 1943

Theo Weissenberger's 'Yellow 4' appears to have undergone the same treatment as Döbrich's machine immediately above. Neither aircraft features a rudder scoreboard (the practice of recording kills in this way was clearly becoming less common by this stage of the war in the Arctic), although both pilots had by this time amassed considerable scores. Döbrich had reached his half-century on 23 March 1943, while Weissenberger, who had begun his operational career with the *Zerstörerstaffel* (see profile 11), had taken his total to 86 by mid-May of that year.

27

Bf 109G-2 'Black 8' of Feldwebel Jakob Norz, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, June 1943

Centurion-to-be 'Jockl' Norz's score had reached a more modest 20 by late June 1943. His *Gustav* wears the standard grey-on-grey dapple finish of the mid-war years, with the individual numeral '8' and the III. *Gruppe* disc both thinly outlined in white. It also carries the combined *Gruppe* and *Staffel* badges as depicted in profiles 18

and 22, albeit in reverse order with 8. *Staffel*'s 'Edelweiss' emblem on the left (whether there was any specific reason for this change, or whether the positioning was purely arbitrary, is not known).

28

Bf 109G-2 'Black Chevron' of Oberleutnant Günther Schwanecke, *Gruppen-Adjutant* II./JG 5, Salmijärvi, Finland, August 1943

Possibly the nearest the Luftwaffe ever came to matching the legendary pin-ups sported by the bombers and fighters of the USAAF's 'Mighty Eighth' was this Teutonic maiden astride a broomstick who graced the engine cowling of Günther Schwanecke's *Gustav*. But, as the close-up photo seen earlier in this volume reveals, the expression on the young lady's face was not exactly 'come-hither'! Note also the tropical filter – a seemingly incongruous modification for the Arctic theatre, but in actual fact a necessity when operating from the fine, sandy soil of fields such as Salmijärvi during the summer months.

29

Bf 109G-2 'Black 1' of Oberleutnant Franz Wienhusen, *Staffelkapitän* 5./JG 5, Svartnes, Norway, August 1943

Units deployed up to Svartnes, the small landing strip on the Varanger Peninsula, also benefitted from the use of dust filters, as shown here on Franz Wienhusen's 'Black 1'. Note too the 'four-leafed clover' badge on the engine cowling (originally the emblem of 6. *Staffel*, but now denoting II. *Gruppe*) and the pilot's personal motif – the coat-of-arms of Cologne, presumably his hometown – below the cockpit. Wienhusen was another of the many Arctic aces who were to lose their lives when subsequently serving in Defence of the Reich operations. He was brought down by Allied flak close to the Belgian border on 3 December 1944.

30

Bf 109G-2 'Black Chevron 1' of Leutnant Lorenz Andresen, *Gruppen-Adjutant* III./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, autumn 1943

Wearing an altogether lighter finish than Wienhusen's machine

immediately above, Lorenz Andresen's *Gustav* carries no identifying badges at all, not even III. *Gruppe*'s 'Lapp boot' (even though Andresen was the unit's acting adjutant at the time, as is evidenced by the 'Black Chevron 1' staff symbol and III. *Gruppe* disc fore and aft of the fuselage *Balkenkreuz*, respectively). The now Oberleutnant Andresen, *Kapitän* of 9. *Staffel* in March 1944, was an even earlier victim of Defence of the Reich operations, being killed in action whilst attempting to intercept B-17s raiding the Junkers aircraft factory at Dessau on 20 July 1944.

31

Bf 109G-2 'Black 13' of Leutnant Hans-Bruno Diepen, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, late 1943

After Feldwebel Heinz Bartels was posted away from 8./JG 5 for 'disciplinary reasons', his favourite lucky 'Black 13' individual numeral (see profiles 9 and 18) was inherited by Hans-Bruno Diepen, as depicted here on this winter-camouflaged *Gustav*, together with the *Gruppe/Staffel* badge combination (again in reverse (?) order). But luck was not on Leutnant Diepen's side. He was brought down by Soviet flak over the Rybachiy Peninsula on 8 March 1944 and, although extricated severely wounded from his wrecked machine by Russian troops, reportedly died of his injuries later that same day.

32

Bf 109G-2 'Black 9' of Oberfeldwebel Josef Kunz, 8./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, winter 1943-44

In a winter finish similar to 'Black 13' above – i.e. an irregular white overspray covering much of the basic dapple-grey camouflage scheme (while leaving the fuselage *Balkenkreuz* untouched) – Josef Kunz's 'Black 9' has dispensed with the unit badges beneath the cockpit. The 250 kg bomb on the ventral rack is indicative of the unit's occasional but growing involvement in *Jabo* operations. Leutnant Kunz's own operational career came to an end flying in Defence of the Reich operations when he was badly wounded in a dogfight with P-47s southwest of Mannheim on 14 January 1945.

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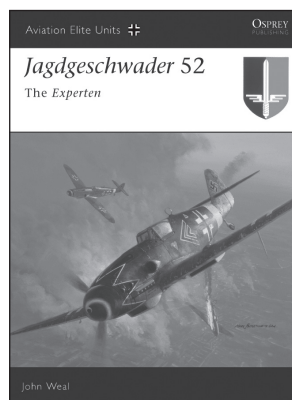
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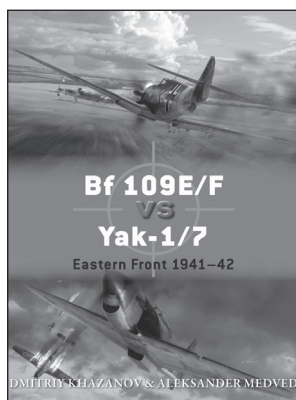
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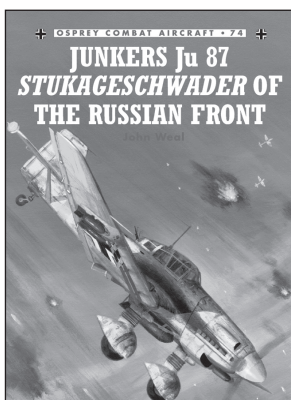
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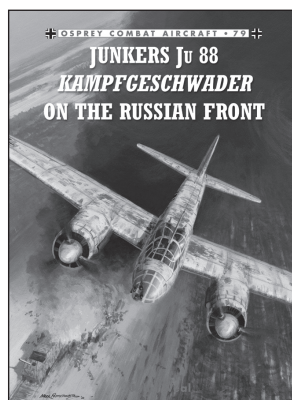
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